

**Femininity at the Crossroads:
Negotiating National and Gender
Peripherality in the Russian Fashion Journal
Modnyi magazin (1862-1883)**

Mariia Alesina

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Marianne Van Remoortel

Co-Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Ben Dhooge, Dr. Koenraad Claes

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Summary

This dissertation is dedicated to studying the original gendered discourse shaped in the pages of the prominent yet neglected Russian fashion journal *Modnyi magazin* (1862-1883) published and edited in St. Petersburg by Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei (1821-1889). In uncovering the image of femininity shaped by the magazine, I particularly focus on how the editorial staff addressed the double peripherality of its female Russian readers: as Russians among Europeans and as women among men.

In Section One, I reconstruct the extended biography of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei and examine her formative role in shaping the idiosyncratic format and editorial program of *Modnyi magazin* that brought together fashion and intellectual debates. In Section Two, I study Rekhnevskaja-Mei's original discourse on fashionable femininity which she shaped in her regular fashion column by discussing Parisian fashion. In Section Three, I focus on the feminist agenda of *Modnyi magazin* which was raised by the editorial staff in the journalistic contributions of the literary section. Finally, I conclude on how the magazine merged fashion and feminism as well as Russian and Western socio-cultural contexts within its original discourse on femininity.

By focusing on Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modnyi magazin*, I bring up the unique role that the magazine played in the history of the Russian fashion and women's press, the complexity and idiosyncrasy of the editorial framework and discourse, and its remarkable yet forgotten woman editor. On the methodological level, this research engages with the concepts developed within the transnational cultural studies, particularly the center-periphery model and the notion of peripheral intellectuals, and complements it with the recent insights from the periodical studies.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift is gewijd aan het bestuderen van het originele genderdiscours in de pagina's van het prominente Russische modetijdschrift *Modnyi magazin* (1862-1883) waar nog maar weinig onderzoek naar is verricht en dat in St. Petersburg werd gepubliceerd en geredigeerd door Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei (1821-1889). Door het beeld over vrouwelijkheid te onthullen dat door het tijdschrift werd geconstrueerd, richt ik me vooral op de manier waarop de redactie met de dubbele periferie van haar vrouwelijke Russische lezers omging: als Russen onder Europeanen en als vrouwen onder mannen.

In het eerste deel reconstrueer ik de uitgebreide biografie van Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei en onderzoek ik haar bepalende rol bij het vormgeven van het eigenzinnige format en het redactionele programma van *Modnyi magazin*; een magazine dat mode en intellectuele debatten samenbracht. In deel twee bestudeer ik Rekhnevskaja-Mei's oorspronkelijke discours over modieuze vrouwelijkheid, dat ze vorm gaf door in een vaste modecolumn de Parijse mode te bespreken. In deel drie focus ik me op de feministische agenda van *Modnyi magazin*, dat door de redactie werd voorop gesteld in journalistieke bijdragen van literaire rubrieken. Ten slotte concludeer ik hoe dit tijdschrift mode en feminisme alsook Russische en westerse sociaal-culturele contexten samenvoegde binnen het oorspronkelijke discours over vrouwelijkheid.

Door te focussen op Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modni Magazin*, breng ik de unieke rol op de voorgrond die het tijdschrift speelde in de geschiedenis van de Russische mode- en vrouwenpers, de complexiteit en eigenzinnigheid van het redactionele kader en het discours en van haar opmerkelijke maar vergeten vrouwelijke redacteur. Methodologisch houdt dit onderzoek zich bezig met de concepten die zijn ontwikkeld binnen de transnationale *cultural studies*, met name het centrum-periferie model en het concept van perifere intellectuelen, en vult dit verder aan met recente inzichten uit onderzoek naar tijdschriften.

Aangezien de Russische modepers uit de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw beschouwd wordt als een triviaal en conventioneel genre, werd het door onderzoekers bijna volledig over het hoofd gezien. Deze studie biedt een antwoord op dit hardnekkig stereotype en vormt de basis voor verder onderzoek in dit vakgebied.

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Introduction

The 72nd Cannes Film Festival opened on May 13, 2019, with a film by Jim Jarmusch, *The Dead Don't Die*, in which an iconic American actress, Tilda Swinton, played female lead character. At the press-conference following the screening, she commented emotionally on a journalist's remark about the fact that, out of twenty film directors selected in the main competition, only four were women:

I want to emphasize that women have been making films for eleven decades now. There are hundreds of films made by women out there. The question is: why do we not necessarily know about them? We have truly great women masters, like Kira Muratova [Soviet and Ukrainian film director], who has recently passed away. When great male masters die, the press dedicates multiple pages in their tribute. In contrast, Muratova received just a couple of lines in the main national newspapers. That's where we need to start. We need to look at women, we need to appreciate their work and be interested in it – and then we will know that it exists. It is not difficult to find – it is all around us. We just need to pay attention and bring it up.

While Tilda Swinton's passionate remark concerned women all around the world, is it nevertheless a mere coincidence that she refers to an Eastern European woman as an example of a neglected woman's voice? For instance, a photo of the recently-deceased French woman director Agnès Varda was put on the official poster of the 72nd Cannes film festival, inviting a world-wide tribute to her legacy. In contrast, Kira Muratova's death was indeed only briefly mentioned in the press and overlooked by the general public, unnoticed as offering a prominent contribution to cinema. Even in the twenty-first century, women remain marginalized the world over, and Europe is not an exception. However, Russian and Eastern European women are not only located on the margins of contemporary European public life, but also on the margins of European women's history.

The roots of this situation can be traced back more than two centuries. In her comparative studies of the self-identification of eighteenth-century British and Russian noblewomen through their private correspondence, researcher Darcie Mawby highlights the exclusion of Russian women from pan-European history. She argues that they 'have generally been rendered invisible. All were obscured because of their sex and Russian women more so for their very Russianness. They were characterized as peripheral to European society with a reputation for backwardness'.¹

¹ Darcie Mawby, 'The 'Russian' Woman? Cultural Exceptionalism among Noblewomen in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia', *Midlands Historical Review*, Vol. 1 (2017), p. 3.

In light of the unique historical development of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Russian women are generally regarded as culturally exceptional. Meanwhile, socio-cultural influences from the West played a central role in Russian women's history and were among the crucial factors defining national gender norms.² The formative influence of European culture over Russian women's history has only begun to be studied. For instance, Linda Edmondson argues convincingly that we lack the understanding of not only the differences but, most importantly, the similarities between Russian and pan-European women's histories.³

Nevertheless, the remark about Russian women's historical 'invisibility' is relevant not only for international scholarly tradition but even for national historiographies that include the European portions of the former Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Due to the biases of Soviet historiography, which put ultimate emphasis on the events and personalities that contributed to the Russian revolution of 1917 and dismissed all the rest as irrelevant or even 'harmful', a large range of socio-cultural material still remains neglected by scholars or is interpreted along the lines of the ideology-based agenda established during Soviet times. Mainstream Russian women's history, with its peculiarities and dignitaries, is one of the most remarkable examples in this regard. Not only were Russian women throughout history largely deprived of the opportunity to express themselves and discouraged from participating in cultural production, even nowadays their historical legacy remains largely ignored. In this context, Tilda Swinton's rallying cry is of utmost relevance: our lack of knowledge of women's work does not mean that it does (or did) not exist but points to the need for uncovering it and bringing it up.

The question of addressing this lacuna boils down to identifying primary sources. One such neglected source is the early Imperial fashion press. Despite rich Russian scholarship on the nineteenth-century periodical press as the major forum for public debate, the vast corpus of the most popular type of women-targeted periodicals, fashion magazines, is almost completely ignored. Considered the predominantly women's periodical genre for commercial and entertainment interests, it has been neglected as marginal to the development of Russian culture. At the same time, fashion journalism and editorship was one of the few legitimate and socially-acceptable public occupations available to educated women in the nineteenth century. Even more so, it constituted the very mainstream of imperial women's journalism. Furthermore, being targeted at women and edited primarily (and often exclusively) by women, the nineteenth-century

² I discuss this question later in the introduction.

³ Linda Edmondson, 'Feminism and Equality in an Authoritarian State: The Politics of Women's Liberations in Late Imperial Russia,' in *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century. A European Perspective*, ed. by Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 221- 239.

fashion press was arguably a unique platform allowing Russian women to actually address their marginality, both cultural and social.

Based on the import of Western cultural models and centred around the concept of femininity, nineteenth-century Russian fashion press was located at the intersection of the gendered and transnational dimensions of culture. According to the pioneering historian of the Russian fashion press, Christine Ruane, early fashion publishers and editors hold ‘tremendous responsibility’ for influencing not only how women dressed but also for shaping the gender order in imperial Russia: ‘More was being imported from western Europe than merely news about clothing styles’.⁴ Therefore, this women-targeted and women-edited periodical genre provides an invaluable source of information for studying Russian women’s history as part of pan-European history, allowing for the examination of the role of editors as actors in bridging the gap between the two. Furthermore, as fashion magazines were mostly edited by women themselves, they allowed women to engage with contemporary debates, to both express themselves and shape the opinions of other women. In this regard, the Russian fashion press sheds light on a neglected aspect of social and cultural life in Russia and in Europe in the modern period: the contribution of women editors to contemporary public debates, especially those on concerned with femininity.

Addressing this gap, this dissertation is dedicated to studying one of the most popular fashion and women’s journals of the time, *Modnyi magazin* ([Fashion Store], 1862-1883). For twenty years, it was run by a prominent yet forgotten Russian woman publisher and editor, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei (1821-1889). In her book *Costume and Fashion of the Russian Empire: The Epoch of Alexander II and Alexander III*, the well-known Russian art-historian Olga Khoroshylova relies on the Russian fashion press of the period (1855-1894) as one of her major primary sources. When it comes to contemporary St. Petersburg fashion discourse, Khoroshylova, with very few exceptions, almost entirely reconstructs this discourse through the standpoint shaped by the fashion editorials of *Modnyi magazin*. She frequently refers to the editorial remarks and critical comments, especially those concerning the ways in which the Western fashion was introduced to the Russian audience. Nevertheless, while Khoroshylova implicitly presents *Modnyi magazin* as the local ‘fashion bible’, authoritative and appreciated by elegant St. Petersburg ladies, the author does not include any information about the magazine itself nor the person who stood behind it and its rhetoric. Who was this mysterious woman who created the magazine which influenced the perceptions of her most sophisticated female compatriots and continues still to determine our understanding of the St. Petersburg fashion discourse of the period? In this dissertation, I study the

⁴ Christine Ruane, *The Empire’s New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009), 102.

remarkable case of the Russian fashion press, examining both its woman editor as a cultural actor and the magazine itself as a platform for negotiating the double peripherality of its female Russian readers: as Russians and as women.

State-of-the-art: Early Russian fashion press as a neglected field

Scholarship on the nineteenth-century Russian fashion press is characterized by a striking prejudice, according to which these mainstream periodicals are seen as ‘fluff’ journalism, both trivial in their subject-matter and a priori conventional or even retrograde in their rhetoric.⁵ In contrast to the praised Russian literary-philosophical journalism (exemplified by the so-called ‘thick journals’ that were the main platforms for nineteenth-century intellectual debates), fashion magazines were not considered by scholars as worth serious attention. As a result, the vast corpus of the most popular type of women-targeted periodicals and the very mainstream of women’s journalism in the Imperial period remains almost completely ignored.

Exploring the nearly untouched domain of the pre-revolutionary women’s press, a few recent Russian studies either take a large-scale typological approach, which classifies fashion magazines as one among other types of women’s magazines, or use them as a source of historical information. Thus, Viktoria Bonner-Smeukha (2001) works on the typology of women-targeted publications of the Russian Empire, Ksenia Mitrokhina (2007) studies the development of the women’s press before 1861, and Elena Kolomijtseva (2008) focuses on the rise of the genre of women’s universal magazines in Russia. Maria Kotovskaia (2013) and Valeria Nesterova (2013) use women’s magazines as the material for exploring the lifestyle of Russian women in the nineteenth century. None of these approaches regards fashion magazines as cultural products as such, nor do they provide in-depth content analysis of the early fashion periodicals. Furthermore, while there are no Russian studies that focus specifically on the fashion press, those that mention it as a part of other research do not discuss the formative role of editors and publishers in shaping its format and rhetoric. Anna Maevskaia (2015) studies the evolution of glossy magazines in Russia and is the only researcher who attempts to trace the influence of foreign ideas on the development of the Russian women’s press. Nevertheless, she focuses on magazines of the twenty-first century. The popular fashion press of the second half of the nineteenth century is not a focus of the study and is discussed only briefly.

⁵ Christine Ruane, ‘The Development of a Russian Fashion Press in Late Imperial Russia: *Moda: Zhurnal dlia svetskikh liudei*’, in *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. By Jeanne Gheith and Barbara Norton (Durham & Londond: Duke university press, 2001), 74.

It is remarkable that Russian scholars tend to focus either on the proto-fashion journals of the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries or the fashion press in contemporary Russia. In contrast, the popular fashion press of the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries is discussed only very briefly. In the meantime, the Russian fashion press of this neglected period not only reached a women's audience beyond high society, but also became closely intertwined with the European fashion press' market. The first step towards addressing this gap in research was made by American scholar Christine Ruane, whose path-paving monograph on the history of the Russian fashion industry includes a chapter on the fashion press in the late Russian empire. She presents its evolution as divided into two periods, characterized, first, by elitist and locally-focused magazines (1831-1870) and, second, by popular journals which appropriated their content almost entirely from the Western fashion press, French and German in particular (1870-1917). In this respect, Ruane's findings also shed light on the research potential of studying the fashion press rhetoric with regards to the cultural adaptation of imported content.⁶ This historical overview so far constitutes the only attempt to specifically study the Russian fashion press market of the period.

Lack of research on the popular fashion press advances another scholarly stereotype, namely that women rarely edited magazines for women in the Russian Empire. For instance, in her overview of the discourse on the nineteenth-century women's press, Russian women's history scholar Irina Iukina claims that until the last decades of the century, popular national women's magazines were

strictly speaking, not women's magazines, but magazines for women: behind them, directly and metaphorically, stood men. [...] The emergence of women's magazines in the genuine sense of the word—magazines 'published by women for women', thus, founded, edited and published by women to deal with women's problems from an 'internal' female standpoint—took place later, closer to the end of the twentieth century.⁷

As seen throughout Europe, credit for developing the Russian fashion press market almost exclusively goes to well-known male publishers, particularly Herman Goppe (1836-1885) and Nikolai Alovert (1847-1927). However, as the fundamental bibliography of the Russian periodical press by Nikolai Lisovskiï reveals, from the actual emergence on the scene of the Russian fashion press in 1831 (the year the first long-standing fashion magazine, *Vaza* ([Vase], 1831-1884, was

⁶ See Ruane, 'Development of a Fashion Press', 74-91.

⁷ Irina Iukina, 'Дискурс женской прессы XIX века' [Discourse of the Nineteenth-Century Women's Press]. *Женские и гендерные исследования* [Women and Gender Studies], no. 5 (2000): 32.

launched) many fashion periodicals – not to say the absolute majority of them – were edited by women. While this evidence alone demonstrates an almost 90-year-long history of female fashion editorship in the late Russian Empire, this contribution generally remains ignored by Russian researchers: from the fundamental works on the history of Russian periodical press (such as the one by Boris Esin) to the abovementioned recent studies on nineteenth-century women's magazines.

In the last decade, two pioneering Western scholars endeavoured to fill this gap and shed light on the formative contribution of women professionals to the Russian fashion press. Their studies contributed to a recent volume on early Russian women in journalism edited by Jeanne Gheith and Barbara Norton, *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia*. The above-mentioned historian Christine Ruane contributed a case study to this volume, *Moda: Zhurnal dlia svetskikh liudei* ([Fashion: Journal for Worldly People], (1851-1861). This study sheds light on how 'the enormous success of the "marginalized" fashion magazines frequently allowed women journalists and publishers to move into other more "serious" areas of journalism dominated by men'.⁸ In the same volume, another American scholar, Carolyn Marks, reveals women's formative presence as editors and publishers of Russian fashion magazines. In her chapter on the rise of the Russian women's magazine, she examines four popular and enduring women's magazines (three of them on fashion) edited by different men and women and demonstrates how elements of the editors' and publishers' identities influenced the agenda of the periodicals in the broader context of socio-economic changes.⁹ Both studies shed first light on the formative role of women professionals in establishing and developing the fashion press market in the Russian Empire.

The research findings provided by Ruane and Marks challenge not only the aforementioned stereotype regarding the supposed lack of women's presence in this domain, but also the stereotype regarding the supposed triviality of its content. Commercially-driven fashion magazines in Imperial Russia were generally assumed to be conventional in terms of their agenda and rhetoric: not only on political but also on socio-cultural matters, such as gender norms. For instance, Iukina argues that women's magazines before the 1890s 'reflected and contributed to the official public discourse and concept of femininity, the central component of which was successful marriage as the main token of a woman's social success'.¹⁰ Similarly, in the article on feminist women-edited

⁸ See Ruane, 'Development of a Fashion Press', 74.

⁹ Carolyn Marks, 'Providing Amusement for the Ladies: The Rise of the Russian Women's Magazine,' in *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. by Jeanne Gheith and Barbara Norton (Durham & London: Duke University press, 2001), 100.

¹⁰ Iukina, 'Discourse of the Women's Press', 33.

publications in St. Petersburg, American scholar of Russian women's history Rochelle Ruthchild claims that the vast majority of the women-edited press between 1860 and 1905 'focused on traditionally accepted subjects, such as fashion, food, charity, and childrearing'.¹¹ In contrast, Ruane's and Marks' pioneering studies outline the vast research potential of investigations into the early Russian fashion press' role – and that of its women editors – in broader socio-cultural processes, particularly in the crafting of popular conceptions on femininity. For example, in her case study on the mid-century elitist magazine *Moda* (1851-1861), Christine Ruane argues that fashion periodicals edited by Russian women, veiled by the stamp of a 'conventional' genre, became 'forums for serious cultural debate'.¹² Discussing other fashion magazines, she stresses that '[t]he ability of domestically produced fashion magazines to connect Russian women with a world outside of their own daily existence had an important educative role'.¹³ On her part, Marks points out the role of women editors as cultural actors providing their women readers with 'an ever broader set of roles from which to choose, in both the home and the professional world'.¹⁴

Among the variety of fashion magazines published in St. Petersburg (the Empire's fashion capital) in the second half of the nineteenth century, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modnyi magazin* stands out in the crowd and invites close scholarly attention. This publication is as neglected by scholars as any other Russian fashion magazine of the second half of the century. It was briefly examined in both the abovementioned overview of the early fashion press by Christine Ruane and the comparative analysis by Carolyn Marks. Ruane provides the general framework which allows *Modnyi magazin* to be categorised among other fashion magazines of the period. Marks provides some initial research on the editor's biography and sheds light on the magazine's intermediate position between entertainment and the emancipatory women's press. Arguably one of the most idiosyncratic women-targeted magazines in the Russian Empire, *Modnyi magazin* was at once representative of the evolution in both women's and fashion magazines and remarkable as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Studying it not only highlights a prominent case in itself, but also uniquely allows for addressing simultaneously all the major lacunas in the state-of-the-art: the lack of research on the evolution of the pre-revolutionary Russian fashion and women's press, women's early presence as editors and publishers, and the stereotype on the 'triviality' of content of the fashion press.

¹¹ Rochelle Ruthchild, 'Feminist Publications and Publishers in St. Petersburg, 1899-1917', in *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 33, no. 1 (2006): 27.

¹² Ruane, 'Development of a Fashion Press', 74.

¹³ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 112-113.

¹⁴ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 113.

Modnyi magazin was published during the decades which formed a crucially important period for Russian society in general and Russian women in particular. It was founded in 1862, just one year after the abolition of serfdom in Russia. The years surrounding the launch of the magazine signified the unprecedented liberalization of the public sphere and the profound transformation of socio-economic life in the Empire. Following the disastrous defeat of the Russian Empire in the Crimean War (1853-1856), the tsar Alexander II (1855-1881) started a massive campaign aimed at modernizing the country. In the first decade of his reign, censorship was loosened, which signified the state's invitation to journalists and literati to express their ideas, allowing for vibrant intellectual debates on reforming the country. In these years, a so-called 'woman question', or a question about the social role, education, and rights of women, was raised in the periodical press as a 'burning' questions of the time. *Modnyi magazin* was the only fashion magazine launched in 'the most exciting and intellectually stimulating period in the history of the woman question in Russia'.¹⁵

Subsequent decades constituted an extremely turbulent era for Russian women. The perception of female roles was shifting constantly under the influence of social, economic, and cultural developments. As argued by Engel, '[m]ultiple and competing ideals of womanhood coexisted in imperial Russia. [...] Particularly after the mid-century a host of social, professional, and political groups vied with church and state in attempting to reshape conceptions of and behavioural norms for women'.¹⁶ Engel points to the dubious effect of growing urbanization and industrialization on Russian women's lives. She emphasizes that new values and lifestyles fostered new desires and provided new opportunities, while also triggering new anxieties and uncertainties for women of different social classes.¹⁷ During these years, *Modnyi magazin* was one of very few Russian women's magazines in the full meaning of the word: created by a woman and for women. All other fashion and women's magazines had several people (both men and women) involved at different times as publishers and editors. In contrast, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei was the sole woman founder, publisher, and editor of her magazine. Since all the credits for developing its rhetoric and agenda can safely go to her, this allows us to focus on the contribution of a prominent woman in shaping Russian culture and society by editing a women-targeted magazine.

In the course of the century, Russian fashion press had evolved from elitist literary magazines with columns on fashion and high society news to sophisticated illustrated publications

¹⁵ Edmondson, 'Feminism and Equality', 229.

¹⁶ Barbara Alpern Engel, 'Women and Urban Culture,' in *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture*, edited by Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi (Open Book Publishers, 2012), 18.

¹⁷ Ibid, 19-40.

targeting a vast female readership and covering a broad variety of topics. While Ruane classified *Modnyi magazin* as a typical example of the upmarket press, it arguably embodied the very transition of this genre towards a more inclusive audience. In contrast to earlier fashion magazines (e.g. *Moda: Zhurnal dlia svetskikh liudei* [Fashion: A Journal for Worldly People], 1851-1861), *Modnyi magazin* broadened its target audience beyond the wealthy elite. In this way, it targeted not only the nobility as a social class but women as a social group. Furthermore, reflecting the spirit of the time, it was the first Russian fashion magazine to include the question of women's social status on its agenda. Discussing the women's press' market in the second half of the nineteenth century, Maevskaia contrasts entertainment fashion magazines with socio-political [социально-политические] women's journals which raised the feminist question and discussed women's emancipation. She maintains that this division resulted in the 'polarization' of the women's audience into two groups, each choosing either the conventional domestic or the socially-oriented type of women's press. However, in contrast to this claim, Marks observes that *Modnyi magazin* combined the entertainment character of a fashion publication with a socially-engaged editorial agenda. She argues that the magazine 'reflected on the question of women's role in reformist Russia and urged readers to be responsible, critical, and intelligent'.¹⁸ Comparing it to the contemporary women's journal *Zhenskii vestnik* ([Women's Herald], 1866-1868), Marks points out that *Modnyi magazin*'s involvement in debates on women's emancipation was comparable to that of the specialized (socio-political, in Maevskaia's terms) publication: '[d]espite their differences, both journals engaged serious issues and elicited responses from both readers and the Russian press'.¹⁹

These brief observations shed first light on the unique role of *Modnyi magazin*'s in the development of the fashion and women's press in Russia and the negotiation of femininities within it. At the same time, these remarks invite further exploration, as the dissertation will demonstrate, into a critical re-interpretation of some of the conclusions made by Ruane and Marks. The richness and idiosyncrasy of its content, the prominence of its woman editor and the significance of its contribution to the Russian periodical press landscape compel a single case research study. Such a study will allow for a detailed discussion of all these aspects, which, in its turn, will shape the ground and open the floor for further research in this vast domain.

Research questions

¹⁸ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 95.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The findings of Ruane and Marks shape the basis for the research question of this dissertation. First, I aim to further elaborate on Ruane's approach to examining the Russian fashion press as a platform for negotiating both the Russian cultural identity and gender norms. For instance, in her article on *Moda*, Ruane puts forward the argument that the Russian fashion press discussed cultural relations between Russia and the West and provided its readers with a certain self-image vis-à-vis other Europeans. Furthermore, in her monograph *The Empire's New Clothes*, Ruane argues that the popular magazines of the second half of the century influenced Russian women's self-identity by allowing them to see themselves as members of 'a modern cosmopolitan community of women who shared the same interests and taste'.²⁰ Taking Ruane's observations as a starting point, I aim to contribute to this argument by tracing such rhetoric in *Modnyi magazin*, which was published in the decades when the fashion press was evolving from a local elitist to a more cosmopolitan and inclusive genre. Second, I aim to elaborate on Marks' comment regarding *Modnyi magazin*'s agenda of addressing Russian women's social status. Marks' brief observation provides the starting point for further examination of *Modnyi magazin*'s polemics on the woman question and placing it within national and transnational debates on women's emancipation.

In this context, the object of this research is the contribution of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei and her *Modnyi magazin* to shaping contemporary standards of femininity. Following the definition provided by Jehanne Gheith in the introduction to the volume *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression. An Anthology of Sources*, I understand 'conceptions of femininity' in this dissertation as 'the representations and expectations of women and the prescriptive norms for women articulated within communities and social groups or by religious, state, or other bodies, or even the individuals, as a means of shaping the identities and behaviour of women'.²¹ The overall research question of this dissertation is thus the following: Which image of femininity did Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modnyi magazin* shape for its readers in the context of their double socio-cultural peripherality: as Russians among Europeans and as women among men?

Theoretical framework

In the article 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context', Lyn Pykett suggests examining periodicals as 'a central component of a culture': an 'active and integral part' which 'can only be read and understood as part of that culture and society, and in the context of other knowledges

²⁰ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 113.

²¹ Robin Bisha et al. *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources*, Indiana University Press, 2002, 17.

about them'.²² Hence, according to Pykett, the ideal standpoint for studying the periodical press is an interdisciplinary one. This has direct implications for organizing the research: 'the theoretical framework adopted will to a great extent determine the object: our perspectives on the periodical press, what are we looking at, the kinds of structure in which we locate it and how we read it'.²³ In line with this insightful remark, I first frame my theoretical approach from a broad perspective and then gradually home in to focus on more specific aspects.

To begin with, we must recognize that the Russian press in general – and the fashion press in particular – can not be regarded in detachment from the cultural history of Russia, in which the West plays a constitutive role, as will be discussed below. Thus, to provide both the theoretical framework and the historical background for this research, I begin by reflecting on the specific nature of cultural relations between Russia and the West, based on centre-periphery models developed at different times by Edward Shils and Ulf Hannerz. I refer to both authors since their approaches are complementary and, if used together, add useful nuances to one another. In addition, I complement them with remarks of the Polish scholar Tomasz Zarycki, another theoretician of the center-periphery interplay, who specifically focuses on Eastern European societies. Building upon – and engaging with – the explanatory potential of this theoretical standpoint and aiming to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the key components of my research within this framework, I discuss the following questions: What was the place of nineteenth-century Russia in the global cultural context? What, if seen from a gendered perspective, does this tell about the blank pages of Russian women's history? Furthermore, how can research into the women-edited fashion press fill these gaps?

Metropolis-province, or centre-periphery interplay

Nineteenth-century cultural relations between Russia and the West can be regarded within a centre-periphery framework developed in sociology in the 1960s, which remains a major model for explaining the circulation of culture in the world. While this kind of asymmetrical relationship is typical for between the capital and the provinces within a nation, this general model is also applied to explain the way in which countries, regions, and cultures interact. A classic theorist in applying this framework to the cultural domain, sociologist Edward Shils explains the organization of any society (as well as the international 'society of societies') as an interplay of centre ('metropolis') and periphery ('province'). In Shils' reasoning, metropolitan centres dictate the

²² Lyn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context', in *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22, no.3 (Fall, 1989): 102.

²³ Ibid.

general framework of cultural development, which is followed in the periphery with a varied degree of cultural adjustment and re-interpretation. According to Shils, 'The metropolis is a centre of vitality. It is a seat of creativity. [...] the exercise of authority from that centre reinforces the inclination to heed whatever emanates from it'.²⁴ Cultural development in the province is characterized by following the 'fundamental orientation of the metropolis'²⁵ and by seeking recognition from it, such that: 'Sensitive provinciality produces a feeling of its inferiority to the metropolis; it feels the necessity and obligation to acknowledge the standards – moral, cultural, intellectual and political – which are believed to obtain in the metropolis.'²⁶

Provincial intellectuals as 'voltage changers' and cultural brokers

Swedish social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz further elaborates on the distribution of culture in the world in the context of the asymmetrical centre-periphery relationship. More specifically, Hannerz suggests that the periphery engages with the transnational cultural flow actively and creatively: 'People from both center and periphery, and from different centers and different peripheries, engage in the ongoing management of meaning within them to a greater extent as both producers and consumers, in a joint construction of meaning and cultural form'.²⁷ While these 'people from the periphery' include the population of the peripheral countries at large, a particular role is played by the local cultural elites who are directly involved in the production of cultural meanings. But who are the local actors responsible for bridging and reconciling metropolitan and provincial cultural fields? Answering this question, Hannerz refers to a figurative description suggested by Arnold Toynbee: 'In any community that is attempting to solve the problem of adapting its life to the rhythm of an alien civilization, there is a need for a special social class to serve as the human counterpart of the 'transformer' which changes an electric current from one voltage to another'.²⁸ Toynbee astutely calls these local cultural actors 'liaison officers who have learnt the tricks of the intrusive civilization's trade'.²⁹ Both Hannerz and Shils refer to this social class as 'local intellectuals', or 'peripheral elites', in the terms of Thomas Zarycki. Shils broadly defines intellectuals as 'sensitive, inquiring, curious, creative minds in the society'³⁰ operating through 'such intellectual institutions as schools, churches, newspapers, and similar structures'.³¹ 'Through these, ordinary persons [...] enter into contact, however extensive, with those who are most

²⁴ Edward Shils, 'Metropolis and Province in the Intellectual Community', in *The Intellectuals and The Powers and Other Essays*, Edward Shils (University of Chicago Press, 1972), 357.

²⁵ Ibid, 363.

²⁶ Ibid, 358.

²⁷ Ibid, 249.

²⁸ Ibid, 257.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Shils, *The Intellectual and the Powers*, 4.

³¹ Ibid.

familiar with the existing body of cultural values'.³² Thus, provincial intellectuals are those responsible particularly for the intermediation between the metropolitan culture with its high and dynamic standards and the provincial life with its peculiarities and – often – limitations.³³

Shils, Hannerz, and Zarycki all agree that this socio-cultural mediation is a critical function of local elites due to their socialization in two cultural worlds – those of the centre and the periphery.³⁴ Zarycki introduces ideas about the specific discourse of peripheral elites, who 'live in a two or more dimensional social space and communicate in at least two separate codes (particularly languages): peripheral and central'.³⁵ They are thus able to connect their compatriots to the transnational (metropolis-centred) body of cultural symbols beyond the direct reach and understanding of broader social circles, who generally know only the local code. In a broader sense, Hannerz points out that among key preconditions for cross-cultural mediation are intellectuals' cosmopolitan worldviews and the certain metacultural standpoint that results from it: 'There is, first of all, a willingness to engage with the Other, an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences.'³⁶ According to Hannerz, this position enables these intellectuals to be a transmission link between the metropolis and the province: 'More or less at home in the world and not least in the centre, familiar with its tendencies and fashions, the intellectuals of the periphery or semi-periphery bring these back home'.³⁷

A crucially important point for the proper understanding of the paramount role which provincial elites play as mediators between the provincial and the metropolitan cultural fields is their sense of peripherality vis-à-vis the metropolitan culture, which fosters them to develop their own culture. According to Zarycki, 'the periphery is not only extremely sensitive to political and economic, but also to symbolic domination of the center',³⁸ and the elites are the first to develop such a sense of peripherality. To this end, Shils suggests that this feeling stimulates intellectuals to search for ways to overcome provinciality: 'The feeling of being provincial, of being inferior in intellectual matters, is not a comfort. It creates a stress from which release must be sought'.³⁹ Shils describes possible responses to this sense of provinciality, which vary in their efficiency and contribution to the development of the local culture. By claiming that 'The cure for provincialism

³² Ibid, 5.

³³ Intellectuals and elites are not quite the same, but in the context of this research these social groups are not contradictory but overlapping. As the explanation will show, the editor under scrutiny, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, fits into both categories, therefore here I use them as synonyms.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tomasz Zarycki, 'An Interdisciplinary Model of Centre-Periphery Relations: A Theoretical Proposition', in *Regional and Local Studies*, Special Issue 2007, 110.

³⁶ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 252.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Zarycki, 'Interdisciplinary Model', 125.

³⁹ Shils, 'Metropolis and Province', 369.

is creativity',⁴⁰ he advocates for an assessment of the constructive value of the intellectuals' response to their provincial disposition by the level of their creative engagement in the development of their own culture.

Shils describes two forms of creativity that lead to the transcendence of provinciality and enable culture to contribute constructively to the transnational 'society of societies': focusing on local challenges and creatively integrating the provincial and metropolitan traditions. Shils contends that focusing on local challenges is the primary way of boosting the culture's potential to overcome its peripheral status. This implies that cultural development results from intellectuals' efforts toward solving 'the problems which are really problematic to them and not just to their models in the Western metropolis'.⁴¹ While seeing the first approach as a major factor leading to the transcendence of provinciality, Shils also mentions an alternative (or a complementary) one, which is a way of transforming metropolitan domination over local culture into a constructive impetus for its own development. It consists of 'the creative extension and enrichment of the indigenous tradition by the creative assimilation and adaptation of the metropolitan tradition'.⁴² In a similar manner, Hannerz conceptualizes the participation of peripheral cultural elites in the transnational circulation of ideas as guardians of local culture who 'accept the cultural forms of the center not because they are of the center, but because, recontextualized to other conditions, they are (at times) good to think with and express with'.⁴³

Finally, Shils claims that intellectual activity enables the transcendence of national borders, not only for intellectuals themselves but also for those consuming the results of their work:

Those engaged in intellectual performance, either as producers or as consumers, are joined together in a social system or community. They are bound together by common standards applied to common objects of attention, by personal and corporate ties, and by participation in the same network of institutions through which intellectual life is conducted. This community exists in space in partial indifference to the limits of nations and states.⁴⁴

In this way, intellectuals are connected to the broader transnational community which is centred around the standards and norms established by the metropolis. In the case of the peripheral intellectuals, their local audience follows their lead in comprehending and possibly internalizing these patterns. Nevertheless, Hannerz's addition to Shils' framework, the 'complexity' of cultural

⁴⁰ Ibid, 370.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 360.

interplay, is related to the periphery's answer to dominant metropolitan influence. Hannerz posits that local adaptations of metropolitan cultural patterns to particular 'social structures, to situations and emerging audiences' on the local level may result in 'innovative acts of cultural brokerage' and thus in their turn contribute to the diversity of the global culture.⁴⁵ Thus, engagement with selected technological and cultural features provided by the transnational cultural flow widens the creative potential on the local level and presents new possibilities for unlocking such potential: 'Local cultural entrepreneurs thus gradually master alien cultural forms, taking them apart to investigate their potentialities in terms of symbolic modes, genres, and organizations of performance'.⁴⁶ Regarding the role that provincial intellectuals play in the formation of the global culture, Hannerz emphasizes the impact they might have beyond national borders. Thus, while Shils envisaged the crucial role of local intellectuals in the development of provincial culture in the context of metropolitan domination, Hannerz further discusses the impact which this local work in return has on the 'global ecumene', or global culture. According to him, intellectuals continually reflect on the flow of meaning between local and global cultural contexts, scrutinizing 'the coherence or incoherence not merely of one local or national culture, but those of different cultures in their interrelations, and eventually perhaps of world culture as such'.⁴⁷

Thus, summing up the observations of Shils, Hannerz, and Zarycki, cultural development of the periphery results from the creative response of local elites to external influences, reconciliation of the latter with local tradition, and the creation of an idiosyncratic cultural space, idea, or product. In what follows, I discuss how these theoretical reflections help us conceptualize the cultural relationship between Russia and West, the impact of the latter on Russian culture, and the role which local cultural elites, or peripheral intellectuals play in this process.

Historical context

Russia as a periphery

This interplay of centre and periphery, especially in regards to the role of peripheral intellectuals, is nowhere more relevant than in Russia, for, according to Shils: 'The entire intellectual history of Russia in the nineteenth century can be interpreted in the categories of metropolis and province on the international scale'.⁴⁸ This observation is not lost on Boris Noordenbos, who, in the introduction to his book *Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for a Russian Identity*, cites 'the

⁴⁵ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 242.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 241.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 257.

⁴⁸ Shils, 'Metropolis and Province', 365.

peripheral position of Russian culture vis-à-vis a soi-disant progressive, civilized West’ as among the ‘fundamental problems of self-definition, some of which have tormented intellectuals and nation-builders since at least the nineteenth century’, which, even into the twenty-first century, continue to spur debates on ‘post-Soviet uncertainty about national identity’.⁴⁹ Similarly, Orlando Figes, in his book on Russian culture, remarks how ‘complex feelings of insecurity, of envy and resentment, towards Europe, still define the Russian national consciousness’.⁵⁰ What are the reasons and implications for this specificity of Russian cultural life remaining so pervasive throughout the centuries?

Discussing the role of the West in the formation of Russian culture, Timothy Westphalen argues that the country’s very geographical location determined its cultural self-perception:

Without natural borders for protection and definition, Russia throughout its history had been caught between East and West, mediating between the two, belonging to neither, yet implicated in both. The underlying and fundamental duality of Russia’s position in the world has naturally led to recurrent alternations in its attitude toward the outside world and toward the West in particular.⁵¹

This geopolitical position played the major role in determining the internal dynamics of Russia’s centuries-long debate on the country’s identity, torn between seeking acceptance into the European club, on the one hand, and proclaiming the idiosyncrasy and self-sufficiency of Russian culture, on the other. Addressing Russian diplomatic practices in the context of its encounters with the West over the centuries, Iver Neumann and Vincent Pouliot discuss Russia’s quest for equal status among Europeans. In line with Shils’ reasoning that the periphery ‘seeks the recognition from the metropolis’, Russians craved status as a member of the European community, wanting to be admitted and acknowledged as an equal by their Western counterparts. However, although the country was generally seen as a geopolitical Great Power (particularly after its victory in the 1709 Poltava Battle), Neumann and Pouliot observe how ‘Western actors, throughout history, have looked down on Russia as a backward society’.⁵²

⁴⁹ Boris Noordenbos, *Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for a Russian Identity* (1st. ed. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 9.

⁵⁰ Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Penguin, 2003), 63.

⁵¹ Timothy Westphalen, ‘The West’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, Ed. by Nicholas Rzhevsky (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 94.

⁵² Iver Neumann, Vincent Pouliot, ‘Untimely Russia: Hysteresis in Russian-Western Relations over the Past Millenium’, *Security Studies* 20 (2011): 114.

It was thus the aspiration to be recognized as a ‘civilized’ (as opposed to ‘semi-barbarian’) country that inspired Russia’s most ambitious leaders to Europeanize its cultural life. The idea of being accepted as a member of the European community urged Russia toward massive Westernizing projects. In this context, Westphalen notices a recognizable pattern: ‘when change comes, it comes from the top down. Time and again throughout Russian history, it is the Tsar’s edict that enforced or rejects Western cultural norms’.⁵³ Thus, Peter the Great (1672-1725), with ‘a comprehensive set of social, economic, political, and cultural reforms whose purpose was to make the Russian Empire an equal partner in the European family of nations’ initiated ‘an open, enthusiastic embrace of Europe’ in Russia.⁵⁴ A few decades after that, Catherine the Great (1762-1796) continued this westernizing project with her broad education and cultural reforms, which ‘had created fertile ground for further Europeanization’.⁵⁵ For her, Russian cultural progress implied ‘achieving full Russian participation in the high, French-international court culture of the eighteenth century’.⁵⁶ Half a century later, Alexander II (1855-1881) abolished serfdom, the very symbol of Russia’s barbarianism, and initiated profound administrative and judiciary reforms. These came to be called in the national historiography the Era of Great Reforms and signified yet another attempt to bridge the gap between Russia and the West. Indeed, the popular Russian historian Edvard Radzinsky begins his book, *The Last Great Tsar*, with the following remark: ‘Alexander II dreamed of bringing Russia into the circle of European states, leading the country toward a European constitution. He gave the eternal Russian pendulum that swings between West and East a definite push to the West’.⁵⁷

Waves of Russia’s Westernization, aimed at overcoming the country’s perceived socio-cultural backwardness and achieving recognition by ‘metropolitan’ Europeans, were among the key events in the dynamics of Russian social, cultural, and political life throughout the centuries. In this respect, Neumann and Pouliot observe that ‘there existed a social power differential between Russia and the West, with Russia in the subordinate position’.⁵⁸ Consequently, from the seventeenth century onward, ‘Russia has been a net importer of social models’, emulating Western practices in military organization and economic, political, and cultural life.⁵⁹ The adoption of European models was an attempt to bridge the gap between Russia and the West. At the same time, they formatively contributed to the formation of the national culture. For example, Peter the Great

⁵³ Westphalen, ‘The West’, 94.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 99.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Abbott Gleason, ‘Ideological Structures’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, ed. by Nicholas Rzhevsky (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 114.

⁵⁷ Edvard Radzinsky, *Alexander II: The Last Great Tsar* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 1.

⁵⁸ Neumann, Pouliot, ‘Untimely Russia’, 112.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

moved the capital from historical Moscow to Russia's first European city, the newly-built St. Petersburg.⁶⁰ According to Figes, the very idea of St. Petersburg aimed at shaping the modern image of Russia in the eyes of Europeans: 'The projection of Russia into Europe had always been the *raison d'être* of St. Petersburg'.⁶¹ For the centuries to come, this city, famously titled by Alexander Pushkin as the country's 'Window on the West', remained the embodiment of Russia's assimilation of European culture.⁶² Catherine the Great, Peter's true heir in the Westernization project, launched another massive import of foreign ideational and material forms. For instance, the very beginning of periodical culture in Russia – so prominent in the country's history – resulted from the emulation of a Western model. According to Abbott Gleason, 'Even the politically subversive ideas of the Enlightenment and the means for diffusing them in society – journals – were at first stimulated by Catherine's desire to produce Russian versions of the famous English journals *Spectator* and *Tatler*'.⁶³ Imported from the West (and first edited by the Empress herself) in the nineteenth century, such magazines ironically became public platforms for questioning the appropriateness of the Westernization of Russia and discussing its consequences for national culture. In the nineteenth century, Alexander II's reforms did not envision such a direct takeover of cultural forms, but they nonetheless entailed the entire restructuring of the country's socio-economic life, bringing about industrialization and urbanization, which, in turn, resulted in the westernization of many Russians' way of life, across all social spectrums and over several generations.

Top-down Europeanization and peripheral elites

Russia's Europeanization projects constitute an extreme case of the periphery's attempt to overcome its peripherality by imposing metropolitan behavioural patterns on local elites. According to Westphalen, 'this enforcement from the top down almost always leads to a bifurcation in social response, particularly in the upper classes'.⁶⁴ The question of cultural assimilation of foreign models and their reconciliation with domestic ones was thus the task of the peripheral cultural elite. Such elite in the Russian Empire was generally represented by the nobility, which not only was the most socially and culturally active class but was also the primary target group of Europeanization. While it quickly became Westernized (hence socialized in both the local and metropolitan cultural codes, in Zarycki's terms), attitudes towards the West among the Russian cultural and intellectual elites changed over centuries and decades and often collided

⁶⁰ Westphalen, 'The West', 98.

⁶¹ Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, 61.

⁶² Westphalen, 'The West', 98.

⁶³ Gleason, 'Ideological Structures', 114.

⁶⁴ Westphalen, 'The West', 94.

with one another. While in the nineteenth century the Russian cultural elite broadened to include intellectuals (primarily literati and journalists) from different social milieus, growing tensions between supporters and opponents of Russia's efforts to follow European socio-cultural patterns resulted in the most prominent Russian dilemma of the century: the debates between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles.⁶⁵ The Russian cultural elite in the nineteenth century formed a vague though highly significant social group called *intelligentsia*, with a self-defined role 'as the conscience of society and the guardian of national culture'.⁶⁶ The very birth of this group was the result of intensive cultural import initiated by Peter's reforms: 'Although the Russian intelligentsia did not evolve into a self-conscious social force until the mid-19th century, its origins can be traced to the early 18th century, when Peter the Great embarked on a crash campaign to modernize Russia'.⁶⁷ In this way, throughout the nineteenth century, it was the *intelligentsia* (consisting, first and foremost, of writers and journalists) who debated the extent to which Western socio-cultural patterns should define the course of Russia's development.

In this way, Russian intellectuals participated in the transnational cultural process not only as passive local transmitters and disseminators of the metropolitan Western culture. On the contrary, by debating 'the coherence or incoherence' (in Hannerz' terms) of the interrelation between 'peripheral' Russian and 'metropolitan' European cultures, as well as by questioning the very appropriateness of such situations, they functioned as intermediators, on the one hand, and as critical gate-keepers and guardians of local culture, on the other. Unfortunately, while the Europeanization of Russia played a formative role in Russian women's history, the aspect of women's agency as cultural actors, as intermediators and gate-keepers between Russian tradition and European culture remains a blank page in Russian historiography.

Gendered approach: Russian women as peripheral cultural actors

By probing further into the issue, we learn how Europeanization projects played a central role in Russian women's history as these projects entailed the transformation of gender norms and impacted all major changes to Russian women's social status. Peter the Great's cultural reforms not only obliged the national elite, both male and female, to follow European fashion and codes of conduct, they also 'helped to introduce a new gender order into Russia', which included women in the court life.⁶⁸ Catherine followed Peter's policy on educating 'new' Russians, whose outward

⁶⁵ Ibid, 101.

⁶⁶ Dmitri Shalin, 'Intellectual Culture,' in *Russian Culture at the Crossroads: Paradoxes of Post-Communist Consciousness*, ed. by Dmitri Shalin (New York & London: Routledge, 2018), 41.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 42.

⁶⁸ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 12.

appearance and behaviour would not differ from those accepted in the West. One of Catherine the Great's major innovations was the establishment of *Smol'ny institut*, the first boarding school for Russian noble girls aimed at educating Westernized society ladies. Alexander II's social and administrative reforms proved to be life-changing for all Russians, but particularly for women. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 provoked the socio-economic changes which affected lifestyles and challenged self-identities of women from all social classes and forced many of them to search for employment in the paid labor market.

These reforms had a dual effect on Russian womanhood. On the one hand, the historical juxtaposing of the elites' Europeanized lifestyle with traditional Russian culture and way of life entailed 'uncertainty, flux, and a blending of old and new ideals' in the public perception of femininity.⁶⁹ While initially these changes were relevant to only metropolitan noblewomen, throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth century they were gradually 'percolating both outward from the capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg and – more slowly – downward into middling social groups'.⁷⁰ The rapid socio-economic and socio-cultural changes of the second half of the nineteenth century made the social roles of women from all classes even more confusing (e.g. domesticity versus the need for women's socio-economic integration).⁷¹ On the other hand, this very confusion provided women with an opportunity to circumvent the rigidity of gender norms. Michelle Marrese, a prominent American historian of Imperial Russia, argues that Westernizing projects opened for Russian (noble) women opportunities to participate in public life and brought about more ways of self-expression. While the Europeanizing reforms made Russian noblewomen aware of their peripheral status, they also fostered their cosmopolitanism and allowed them to adopt Western behavioural patterns. For example, Marrese claims that the introduction of European norms broadened the spectrum of social roles available to noblewomen and provided them with the possibility of changing from one type of behaviour to another.⁷² Similarly, growing urbanization and certain liberalization of the Russian public sphere in the 1860s provoked women's desire to 'redefine and re-imagine themselves' as well as to challenge the traditional gendered norms of conduct.⁷³ According to Clements, the instability and social changes of the Great Reforms during the reign of Alexander II, allowed women to openly engage with social affairs:

⁶⁹ *Russian women: Experience and Expression*, 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷² Michelle Lamarche Marrese, "'The Poetics of Everyday Behavior' Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11, no. 4 (2010): 716.

⁷³ See Engel, 'Women and Urban Culture', 19-41.

more women turned from words to actions. [...] Stimulated by articles on the woman question and by the turmoil surrounding the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, such women sought access to education, paid employment, and a role outside the household. From the ferment a feminist movement emerged.⁷⁴

Western culture and Russian tradition were thus intertwined in the shaping of both the national identity and gender norms, and women themselves played a formative role in assimilating the foreign influences with local context. This process corresponds to Hannerz' idea of 'cultural brokerage', or adapting the metropolitan cultural patterns to particular local situations and mastering the alien cultural forms in order to broaden the potential of local culture and society. In this respect, women as much as men could be seen as transformers, or peripheral 'voltage changers', who incorporated the elements of the 'alien' culture into the local tradition and enriched it. However, this aspect of Russian women's participation in the formation of the Russian socio-cultural context has been barely explored.

This question was raised by Marrese, famous for her profound and insightful archival work, in her article 'The Poetics of Everyday Behavior Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity'.⁷⁵ Based on the examination of Russian noblewomen's private writing (e.g. correspondence), she discusses their perceived identity and concludes with a note on their 'unproblematic biculturalism'.⁷⁶ Furthermore, in other studies, Marrese traces this question back to Catherine the Great and Catherine Dashkova (1773-1810), head of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and argues that these prominent women managed to reconcile their Russianness and Europeanness. In this respect, she criticizes the classic idea of the Russian semiologist Iuriy Lotman on the Russian nobility's internal conflict between national tradition and European culture. In contrast, Marrese concludes that 'the Europeanization was a highly selective process of integrating and familiarizing 'alien' culture without displacing Russian values'.⁷⁷ In this respect, her analysis touches upon another even more significant stereotype of the Russian historiography: 'Lotman, like his predecessors, insisted on the essential unchanging wholeness of female nature and located women on the margins of cultural conflict in the post-Petrine era'.⁷⁸ This broadly accepted perception of women as mere passive perceivers of changes imposed on them hinders

⁷⁴ Barbara Alpern Engel, 'Transformation versus Tradition', in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. by Clements, Barbara Evans, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 138.

⁷⁵ Marrese, 'Poetics of Everyday Behavior', 721.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 713.

the very suggestion of women's agency, their formative influence over cultural development, and their role in adopting, adjusting, and (re-)shaping Russian socio-cultural norms.

Indeed, in the centuries-long national debates on Russian identity vis-à-vis the West, women's cultural identification as well as their role in shaping and negotiating cultural norms were totally neglected. While femininity and 'the feminine' constituted a common object of intellectuals' attention, women's own role in the shaping of these categories was not considered. Thus, in fiction, female characters served as a symbolic expression of the Russian culture itself. For example, Orlando Figes argues that Tatiana Larina, the main female character of *Evgenii Onegin*, was presented by Alexander Pushkin as a reflection of the cultural complexity of her environment: 'The syncretic nature of Tatiana's character is an emblem of the cultural world in which she lives. [...] She is torn between the gravitational fields of Europe and Russia'.⁷⁹ In his examination of the Russian 'philosophy of femininity', Russian gender studies scholar Oleg Riabov argues that in the nineteenth century, the search for a female ideal almost merged with Russia's utmost cultural dilemma in its relation to the West: 'The national philosophy of femininity becomes closely related to the Russian philosophy as such. The 'woman question' begins to play the role in the national identity of Russians'.⁸⁰ At the same time, Riabov himself does not mention any woman's name in his detailed overview of the debates on the woman question in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such an interpretation suggests that women's voices were absent even while social prejudices regarding their social roles were being negotiated. Within the male-dominated public discourse, femininity as a philosophical and artistic category was not necessarily related to actual Russian women but was more often seen as an abstract embodiment of the nation's 'soul'. Therefore, while 'a Russian woman' was often put on a pedestal as the purest expression of Russianness, she was nevertheless expected to 'embody' ideals rather than shape, define, or negotiate them. As Barbara Engel observes, throughout the greater part of the national history, 'Women's relations with the state and the larger society were mediated by men, whom law and custom empowered to speak for women. One sex was clearly superior to the other'.⁸¹ As a result of their peripheral status within their own society and culture, both Russian women's subjective experience and their contribution to the discourse were mostly rendered invisible.

The question of Russian women's 'invisibility' as agents of social change formed the subject matter of *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, edited by Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec. According to

⁷⁹ Figes, 'The West', 110.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Engel, 'Transformation versus Tradition', 136.

Clements' contribution to this volume, the reason for women's limited opportunities was the strict hierarchy of the authoritarian state, which was reproduced on the domestic level in the form of a patriarchal family. This determined the role of women's in socio-cultural transformations. It rarely took the form of women's direct engagement in social affairs: 'Resistance was never a course favoured by many Russian women because it was too costly. [...] throughout Russian history the difficulty and futility of most forms of resistance have made it the last resort of the desperate'.⁸² The prominent yet rare exceptions from this pattern (e.g. a female ruler, as Catherine the Great, or a female revolutionary, as Alexandra Kollontai) do not, however, signify the passivity of the majority of Russian women as mere perceivers (in contrast to agents) of socio-cultural changes. On the contrary, Engel, in her contribution to the volume, presents this situation as the result of the historical interpretation:

Even as they perpetuate it, women have always transformed tradition. [...] Because most historians of Russia have conceptualized transformation in terms of the public and the narrowly political, they have overlooked the role of women, who passed their lives in the private sphere of household, family, marriage, and motherhood.⁸³

Engel argues that women's behavioural patterns most commonly took the form of either accommodation ('maximizing the available opportunities without challenging the status quo')⁸⁴ or 'gentle resistance' ('unobjectionable forms when women drew on the prevailing sexual stereotypes to justify the establishment of spheres of activity from which men were excluded. [...] they enable women to achieve independence from male control').⁸⁵ As a result, such subtle ways of transforming traditions made Russian women engaged as cross-cultural mediators almost invisible and hid their contributions to the (trans)national public sphere. Periodical editorship of the 'conventional' or 'trivial' women's press could be seen as one such subtle form of shaping socio-cultural norms and, arguably, subverting gender stereotypes. Ruane specifically argues that Russian women's press editors used fashion publications as a legitimate platform for engaging in public debate.⁸⁶ At the same time, the very fact that this vast domain was generally ignored and considered unworthy of serious scholarly attention supports Clements' statement concerning the researchers' focus on the direct forms of social transformation.

⁸² Barbara Clements, 'Accommodation', in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. by Clements, Barbara Evans, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 6-7.

⁸³ Engel, 'Transformation versus Tradition', 135.

⁸⁴ Clements, 'Accommodation', 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 6.

Researching subtle processes requires subtle approaches, like the one utilized by Marrese in her attempt to uncover Russian noblewomen's self-perception as Russian and/or European by means of examining their private correspondence. This approach was followed by researcher Darcie Mawby who traces 'the ways in which cross-cultural contact informed noblewomen's cultural and national identity, both collectively and individually'.⁸⁷ Both scholars focus on the pre-reform era and thus speak specifically of noblewomen, as other social groups were not yet distinctly impacted by Westernization. Could their approach be extended – further in time and further beyond the nobility? For example, the need for tracing women's 'subtle' cross-cultural connections (e.g., through access to periodicals, travelling, personal communication) is emphasized by Linda Edmondson, who argues that Russia's cultural relationship with the West is critical for a comprehensive assessment of the nineteenth-century women's movement:

The West has featured so prominently in Russian discourses, as an ideal, as a bogey, as a point of comparison. It has been intrinsic to all considerations of Russianness, of the Russian national destiny. In the writings of women's history it has tended to lie beneath the surface, although it becomes more explicit in any discussion of the validity of feminism [...] and even the very nature of the Russian woman.⁸⁸

Thus, Edmondson claims that neglecting the subtle, or less visible elements which shaped Russian women's history hinders our understanding of it as a part of European history. In this dissertation, I suggest that the pre-revolutionary fashion press, in particular Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modnyi magazin*, is an insightful primary source for revealing Russian women's agency as cultural actors who transformed the incoming cultural flow from the West, formatively contributing to local debates on femininity.

Methodology

Key terms and definitions

As follows from the above-discussed, the primary concept which I refer to in my analysis is the notion of a peripheral, or local, intellectual. As suggested by Shils and Hannerz, I understand this term in the broad sense: as related to the person's individual capital rather than to a particular domain or occupation. In this respect, I relate to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of capital and its three forms: cultural, economic, and social, which I will use for discussing Rekhnevskaja-Mei's role as

⁸⁷ Mawby, 'The "Russian" Woman?', 18.

⁸⁸ Edmondson, 'Feminism and Equality', 238.

a peripheral intellectual.⁸⁹ By peripherality, I mean the marginal disposition in regards to the ‘metropolis’, or ‘centre’. In the context of the double socio-cultural peripherality of Russian women, such ‘centres’ were, first, the West (embodied by Western Europe) and, second, men-dominated public life. Russians’ cultural peripherality was determined by their country’s provincial status, according to which it was seen both by Europeans and by Russians themselves as culturally dependent on the West. Social peripherality as women was determined by the patriarchal social structure, which was as evident in Russia as it was in any Western society and which, thus, united female Russians with their counterparts abroad. Therefore, I will focus on the role of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei as a peripheral intellectual who perceived the peripherality of her female Russian audience and negotiated it. In this dissertation, I understand ‘negotiating peripherality’ as, first, addressing this marginal position (raising and critically discussing it) and, second, suggesting practical ways of overcoming it. Finally, I distinguish between the ‘intermediation’, or passive transmission of information (news, ideas, socio-cultural forms etc.), and ‘mediation’, which leaves space for cultural adaptation and creative interpretation. I understand the term ‘mediator’ in the same way.

Fashion press within the centre-periphery interplay

To adjust the overall theoretical framework used to study the periodical press, I refer to Hannerz’ reflections on media and combine them with recent insights from periodical studies. Hannerz emphasizes the transformative socio-cultural role of media as a cultural agency that permits the circulation of culture across national borders. According to Hannerz, media are ‘machineries of meaning’ defined by their capacity to disseminate cultural forms geographically: ‘with regard to the distributive implications of media, the main fact is that the production of meaningful overt forms can occur in one place, their consumption in another’.⁹⁰ This is especially valid in the case of the Russian fashion press, whose very purpose consisted in bringing the European, primarily Parisian, fashion news and trends to the Russian capital and peripheries.⁹¹ Nevertheless, despite the periphery’s cultural dependency on the metropolis, it would be a simplification to regard peripheral media as passive perceivers and transmitters of information and ideas emanating from the metropolis. For example, discussing the impact of globalization on the content of the local media, Dawei Wang concludes that

⁸⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Ed. by J. Richardson (1986, New York: Greenwood), 241-258.

⁹⁰ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 28.

⁹¹ See Ruane, *Empire’s New Clothes*, 87-113.

local cultures are likely to redefine the semiotic and social meanings of imported content. The internationalization of media needs not necessarily undermine national culture; rather, global media is always indigenized. To what extent that indigenization occurs is a more complex question than many critical theorists make it out to be.⁹²

This standpoint provides a framework for conceptualizing the ways in which the early St. Petersburg fashion editor engaged with the information flow incoming from abroad.

Regional cultural brokerage

Within the overall centre-peripheral interplay between Russia and the West, nineteenth-century St. Petersburg occupied a particular position as a peripheral cultural centre. While Petersburg, as mentioned earlier, itself resulted from Western cultural influence, for two centuries it remained Russia's first and main Europeanized city, and its cultural and fashion capital, through which transnational cultural flow entered the country and was disseminated across its vast spaces. In contrast, all other cities and regions in the Russian Empire could be seen as 'doubly provincial', thus peripheral in relation to both the global and regional metropolises. As argued by Hannerz, such 'regional centres' may operate as cultural brokers which adapt the imported global socio-cultural forms to regional conditions.⁹³ St. Petersburg was the Empire's cultural and fashion capital, and all the fashion magazines were published there. According to Ruane, they positioned themselves as 'mediators between Paris and Petersburg, with the ability to interpret what Parisian fashions were appropriate for their Russian clientele'.⁹⁴

Therefore, St. Petersburg-based *Modnyi magazin* can be seen as a local platform for filtering and refracting the cultural flow from the West in line with the local context and as a medium for spreading it further to the Russian provinces. In line with Zarycki's argument, as presented earlier, on mediation through code-switching, I argue that editing a Russian fashion magazine required from a person to switch between the peripheral and central cultural codes, thus acting as a transformer of European discourse in line with local context. In this respect, the role of an editor corresponded to the function assigned by Hannerz to peripheral intellectuals as guardians of local culture: gate-keeping the current of meaning that enters local discourse and deciding which cultural forms and patterns should be let in, ignored, or ultimately rejected.⁹⁵

⁹² Dawei Wang, 'Globalization of the Media: Does It Undermine National Cultures?', in *Intercultural Communication Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 210.

⁹³ See Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 1992.

⁹⁴ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 93.

⁹⁵ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 258.

Furthermore, I suggest that the relationship between the editor and its audience correspond to one of the patterns of asymmetric cultural flow described by Hannerz, the one that he calls the ‘asymmetry in scale’ and which implies that ‘the one can relate to the many either simultaneously or serially, over time’.⁹⁶ Reaching out to ‘the many’ is, according to Hannerz, ‘the simplest way of making the leap from micro to macro levels in cultural process’.⁹⁷ In this way, by reaching out to the many, editing a popular fashion magazine could be seen as a potentially impactful way of participating in spreading and shaping cultural norms.

Fashion magazine a cultural ‘melting pot’

According to Hannerz, ‘each medium [...] through its symbol system, creates its own potentialities and enforces its own constraints on the management of meaning, in its own way of reaching into people’s minds, and possibly their hearts as well’.⁹⁸ What are the particular potentialities of the nineteenth-century Russian fashion and women’s magazine that allow us to regard it as a local platform for shaping discourse? Hannerz suggests four main forms through which culture flows and which shape the social organization of meaning: state, market, form of life, and movement. Thus, cultural flows can be directed either by state (in a top-down manner), by market (through the attribution of meanings and meaningful forms to the commodities and their dissemination by specialists), through forms of life (everyday practices produced and reproduced by people), or through social movements (through self-organized voluntary attempts to transform established cultural meanings). In the Russian case, these four forms of the cultural flow are located within the interplay between the local Russian and adopted Western cultures.

I suggest that the nineteenth-century Russian fashion press, *Modnyi magazin* in particular, can be seen as the intersection point of all four forms of transnational cultural flow, reflecting – and refracting – the discourses emulating from the state, market(s), way(s) of life, and social movement(s). First, in the context of a censored publishing environment, the fashion press operated within the general ideological ‘regime’ set by the state, the reigning tsar in particular, and had to preserve at least the external allure of supporting socio-cultural conventions. In this respect, the magazine’s rhetoric necessarily reflected the official public discourse (e.g. on femininity and relations with the West). Second, the fashion press fulfilled the function of the main mediator between the transnational (Paris-centered) domain of fashion and Russian consumers, with fashion

⁹⁶ Ibid, 59.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

editorials serving as ‘sense-making practices’⁹⁹ of the fashion market. In this respect, the fashion press, third, informed Russians on the Western forms of life, which they generally sought to adopt. And, finally, as with any other press genre, the fashion press could potentially be a printed medium between its audience and social movement(s). As Hannerz argues, ‘we often describe these entities as ‘social movements’, yet [...] they are often very much movements in culture, organizations for ‘consciousness raising’, attempts to transform meanings’.¹⁰⁰ Thus, as a popular women-targeted periodical genre, a fashion magazine could potentially be a leverage for promoting the ideas of the women’s movement, which was taking shape in Russia and abroad in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rhetoric of the social movement could, however, be in conflict with the official state position, since it aims at transforming certain cultural norms embodied in the established way of life. Due to such complexity, fashion magazines could be seen as a mirror of the cultural process itself, in which, as Hannerz argues, ‘these entanglements, involving often mutually contradictory tendencies, also keep the totality alive, shifting, continuously unstable’.¹⁰¹ Seen from this perspective, the nineteenth-century fashion periodical could be seen as a ‘melting pot’ where different types of cultural flows intertwined and, thus, formatively impacted the discourse which was shaped in its pages.

Mediating editorial habitus

To highlight the individual cultural agency of a periodical editor, I suggest referring to the insightful reflections of Matthew Philpotts on editors as mediators in the field of cultural production. He refers to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus and suggests a typology of modes of editorship based on how periodical editors engage with social, economic, and artistic relations which enable the creation and publication of a journal or a magazine. Seeing the periodical editor as an agent in the field of cultural production, Philpotts distinguishes three modes of editorship depending on the individual editorial habitus: ‘the charismatic habitus of the innovative and heretical editor; the bureaucratic habitus of the more conservative and established editor; and the mediating habitus of the editor who seeks to occupy a dynamic position between the extremes of the field.’¹⁰² He associates the most successful realization of the editorial role with the mediating editorial habitus. The mediating editor combines a wide range of diverse competences and skills with, most importantly, individual and professional traits that allow for switching among different

⁹⁹ See Christine Delhay, ‘The Development of Consumption Culture and the Individualization of Female Identity: Fashion Discourse in the Netherlands 1880-1920,’ in *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 1 (2006): 87-115.

¹⁰⁰ Hannerz, Cultural Complexity, 49.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 51.

¹⁰² Matthew Philpotts, ‘The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus,’ in *The Modern Humanities Language Review* 107, no. 1 (January 2012): 61.

tasks, domains, and *modus operandi*, even if these are at times ‘intrinsically opposed to one another’.¹⁰³ According to Philpotts, ‘the ideal editor would possess a highly differentiated, multiple *habitus* encompassing intellectual, economic, and social dispositions which allow him to mediate the network of forces of which he is the focus’.¹⁰⁴

Philpotts developed this approach specifically to explain the role of male editors of literary magazines in the first half of the twentieth century that required an editor to mediate between the generally unrelated and sometimes intrinsically opposed aesthetic and commercial fields. However, the same argument on the key importance of the mediating editorial *habitus* could be applied to the editorship of the nineteenth-century Russian fashion press placed in-between the Russian and Western socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, in the context of women’s peripheral social status, a woman editor could also be seen as a mediator between the general social field and her marginalized female audience. Speaking in Philpotts’ terms, I suggest that a successful woman editor of a Petersburg fashion magazine required ‘a highly differentiated, multiple *habitus*’ which would allow her to mediate ‘the network of forces of which she was the focus’. In this case, such *habitus* implied that she would have the intellectual, social, and economic dispositions necessary for mediating: a) among metropolis, periphery, and periphery of the periphery, b) among the forces of the main forms of culture relevant for a magazine (state, markets, ways of life, social movements) (if I include the previous section), and c) between the general social field and the socially peripheral female audience.

Fashion press: imagined communities, cosmopolitan narratives, and women’s emancipation

A few other findings from periodical studies provide insights on how the nineteenth-century fashion press can foster the formation of new types of women’s social affiliation and become a platform for addressing cultural and social peripherality. Providing readers with the sense of belonging, or affiliation with a certain group or community, constitutes one of the primary functions of the periodical press. In her article ‘Periodicals and the new media: Women and imagined communities’, Margaret Beetham discusses the women’s press’ capacity to cross boundaries and find common ground despite geographical distance and absence of face-to-face contact. Referring to Benedict Anderson’s classic theory on the periodical press as a generator of ‘imagined communities’ and new types of affiliation among strangers, she points out how the

¹⁰³ Ibid, 54.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 43.

popular press granted larger and broader female audiences access to knowledge and power that ‘opened up space for new groups to take part in political debate and to demand access to power’.¹⁰⁵

While the women’s press could be seen as a forum for creating imagined communities of women, the transnational character of the fashion press allows for discussing its potential to shape such women’s communities across national boundaries. Particularly useful in this respect is the notion of a ‘cosmopolitan imagined community of dress’ presented by Kristin Hoganson in her study on national self-identification of nineteenth-century American women. She points to the allure of modernity that Parisian fashion embodied for women all over the world. Following it served as a way to overcome the sense of remoteness from the global fashion center. In this context, Hoganson observes that ‘the Paris-based fashion system reveals imagined communities that extended far beyond the national’.¹⁰⁶ The fashion press played the central role in this process and, through Parisian fashion, fostered the formation of women’s sense of belonging to the transnational imagined community. In a similar way, Christine Ruane discusses how the editors of the early Russian fashion magazine *Moda* invited their female compatriots ‘to participate in the creation of a modern, transnational, cosmopolitan culture’.¹⁰⁷ These arguments point out the instrumental role of the fashion press in shaping women’s collective identities that surpass national borders.

They also indirectly unveil another feature that characterizes fashion press: its appealing allure of modernity. It is a source of information about any sort of phenomena which could be classified as modern and trendy. The fashion press’ capacity for popularizing any product continues to be broadly used for commercial advertisement. Simultaneously, the same mechanism works for popularizing ideas. In her case study on the early woman editor of the American fashion magazine *Harper’s Bazar* (1867-1930), Paula Bernat Bennet talks about an editorial strategy she called ‘subtle subversion’. She discusses how the feminist editor Mary Louise Booth (1867-1889) used the magazines’ commitment to modernity as a convincing justification (or, rather, as veiling) for promoting emancipatory ideas.¹⁰⁸ According to Bennet, ‘With the fashion magazine’s

¹⁰⁵ Margharet Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 232.

¹⁰⁶ Kristin Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 58.

¹⁰⁷ Ruane, ‘Development of a Fashion Press’, 98.

¹⁰⁸ See Paula Bernat Bennet, “Subtle Subversion: Mary Louise Booth and *Harper’s Bazar* (1867-1889).” In *Blue Pencils & Hidden Hands: Women Editing Periodicals, 1830-1910*, ed. by Sharon M. Harris and Ellen Gruber Garvey (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004) 225-247.

modernizing social orientation as her cover', she challenged traditional gender and class values and advocated 'a woman's right to substantive education, meaningful work, and a decent wage'.¹⁰⁹

Reference to the factor of modernity in both Hoganson's and Bennett's arguments is not a coincidence. Providing patterns of modernity can be seen as the core specialization of the fashion press and, in this way, presents a link between reporting on fashion and feminism in its pages: fashion press' modern appeal not only served as a veil for covering the women's movement but also as leverage to promote it as trendy, modern, and cosmopolitan among its readership. Furthermore, Bennet concludes that exactly 'because the *Bazar* was what it was – a fashion magazine – it gave its editor the opportunity of a lifetime, enabling Mary Booth to reach a female audience far greater than any independent feminist journal of the period achieved'.¹¹⁰ This conclusion not only provides a counter-argument to stereotypes about the fashion press' triviality and conventionality, but presents it a viable women-targeted platform for discussing women's emancipation. Most importantly, it points to the decisive role of the editor's personal convictions for turning the advertising potential and popular appeal of the fashion press into leverage for promoting a progressive social agenda, especially one on feminism.

Finally, in the second half of the nineteenth century, fashion and feminism started to become an increasingly transnational phenomena. I suggest combining together all the above-discussed arguments on the fashion press' potential to raise feminist issues and generating imagined communities beyond the national borders. Thus, a fashion magazine arguably provides the fertile ground and a viable platform for shaping the sense of affiliation with a cosmopolitan community of women united by shared ideals and interests. Once again, the realization of this potential depends on the editor's conscious intention and dedication to do so. In this dissertation, I will discuss how Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei uncovered this potential to negotiate the double peripherality of her female Russian readership.

Corpus

My research is based on the close reading and content analysis of all issues of *Modnyi magazin* over twenty one year of its existence. In order to understand the editorial standpoint and agenda, I rely on the following assumption of the intertextual analysis: 'each number of a magazine only makes sense as part of a field of other texts as well as a field of power relations.'¹¹¹ Thus, I studied every article and every issue of the magazine in its relation to other issues and the broader social

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 228.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own*, 5.

context and public discourse. I considered all these materials as constitutive parts of the rhetoric shaped by the magazine and particularly focused on messages which were expressed repeatedly and consistently.

The corpus of the dissertation includes all regular columns and journalistic and publicist articles published in the fashion and literary sections of the magazine: those written by its editor Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei and the magazine's contributors – both male and female, permanent and occasional, published unsigned or under pseudonyms. It also includes all other elements of the magazine: responses to readers, editorial addresses, publishing announcements, illustrations, and advertisements. However, this dissertation does not include the study of Russian and translated literary pieces published in *Modnyi magazin*. While I provide an overview of literary pieces published in the magazine (Chapter Two), I do not close-read them. Rather, I focus specifically on the magazine's original journalistic rhetoric and explicitly communicated editorial messages. The corpus is studied according to the thematic division of the dissertation: analysis of the magazine's program and editorial priorities, its fashion discourse, and rhetoric on the woman question and women's emancipation. In every chapter, I identify programmatic articles and analyse key messages, assess them in relation to the contemporary discourse, and trace the evolution of the rhetoric over time.

Overview of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into three sections, each consisting of either two or three chapters. In them I consecutively analyse how Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei turned her magazine into a platform for negotiating the double peripherality of her female Russian audience.

In Section One, I focus on the personality of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei as the key factor that determined the format and editorial framework of *Modnyi magazin*. In Chapter One, I pull together the variety of primary and secondary sources to reconstruct the biography of the editor. I argue that Rekhnevskaja-Mei was a doubly peripheral intellectual with a complex combination of social, cultural, and economic capital. In Chapter Two, I first argue that her complex and diverse experience and expertise determined her mediating editorial habitus. Then I analyse how the latter helped her shape the idiosyncratic format and editorial framework of *Modnyi magazin*. By consecutively discussing its fashion and literary sections, I highlight the formative role that the magazine played in the history of the Russian fashion and women's press. Finally, I conclude by describing how Rekhnevskaja-Mei's mediating editorial habitus resulted in formulating the magazine as a platform for shaping and negotiating standards of femininity.

In Section Two, I analyse the original discourse on fashionable femininity which Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei generated in the fashion section of *Modnyi magazin*. For this, I study Rekhnevskaja-Mei's fashion column, published in every issue of the magazine and written exclusively by the editor herself. In Chapter Three, I discuss her fashion reporting: the sources of information which she used for her fashion writing and her audience-conscious approach to information. I argue that her fashion discourse was of a hybrid nature as it merged the elements of the European upmarket and popular fashion press. In Chapter Four, I focus her original fashion commentary and study the system of standards, values, and representations which she developed through it. In all these ways, I trace how the editor bridged the gap between the Parisian fashion metropolis and her Russian readers living in both the capital and the provinces. In Chapter Five, I discuss Rekhnevskaja-Mei's interpretation of women's work, or sewing, which she suggested to her female readers as a practical way of addressing not only their cultural peripherality (as Russians) but also their marginal social position (as women).

In Section Three, I consider *Modnyi magazin* as a women's journal and specifically focus on its rhetoric in regards to the contemporary debates on women's emancipation. I study the journalistic materials published in the literary section throughout its twenty years and analyse the discourse which was shaped collectively by the magazine's multiple contributors. More specifically, I study how the editorial staff of *Modnyi magazin*, under Rekhnevskaja-Mei's editorship, addressed the socio-cultural peripherality of Russian women by covering the 'woman question' from a feminist standpoint. In Chapter Six, I discuss the overall position of the magazine and qualify it as feminist. Then I trace its rhetoric on women's education and women's labour. In Chapter Seven, I focus on the magazine's promotion of organized philanthropy as a practical response to the woman question. Throughout the chapter, I trace how the discourse was shaped with reference to Western developments in the domain of women's emancipation.

In the Conclusion, I bring together the findings of the dissertation. I discuss the interplay between the magazine's rhetoric on Russian women's cultural and social peripherality and the image of femininity which was shaped as a result. Finally, I conclude by highlighting the contributions Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei made as a doubly peripheral intellectual toward both bridging the gap between Russian women and their counterparts in the West and shaping Russian women's history as part of pan-European history.

Section One: ‘A Magazine of Her Own’: Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei and *Modnyi magazin*

Section One examines the individual agency of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei as a key factor that determined the format and editorial framework of *Modnyi magazin*. The first chapter reconstructs the biography of the editor and discusses her socio-cultural role as a peripheral intellectual. The second one establishes the link between the personality of Rekhnevskaja-Mei and the format *Modnyi magazin* and highlights her individual agency behind the formative role that the journal played in the history of the Russian fashion and women’s press.¹¹²

Chapter 1: Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei as a ‘Peripheral Intellectual’

The universal primary point of reference concerning pre-revolutionary Russia is *Brokhaus and Efron’s Encyclopaedic Dictionary*. Published in St. Petersburg in 1890-1907, this comprehensive 86-volume publication includes a note on Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei: ‘Mei Sofia Grigorievna, born Polianskaia – writer (1821-1889), the wife of a poet, Rekhnevskaja, in her second marriage; published, from 1862 till 1881, *Modnyi magazin*, where she wrote articles on fashion’.¹¹³ As proof of Tilda Swinton’s remark, which opens the introduction to this dissertation, this note is just two lines long.¹¹⁴ Incomparably longer and more substantial is the article on her first husband, Lev Mei; it contains both the details of his life and an analytical overview of his creative legacy. While both spouses are almost forgotten nowadays, it is much easier to find information on Lev Mei than on his wife. The information provided by *Brokhaus & Efron’s Dictionary* seems to be the only data on Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei that one can easily find today in a Russian-language Google search. Nevertheless, as research has demonstrated, her contribution to Russian socio-cultural life of the second half of the nineteenth century merits a much longer biographical note, as it extended far beyond being ‘the wife of a poet’ and writing articles on fashion.

When Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei died in 1889, the respectable historical review *Istoricheskii vestnik* [Historical Herald] and an influential literary-political newspaper *Novoe vremia* [New Time] published obituary which shed some light on her professional occupation and private life.

¹¹² All translations from Russian are my own.

¹¹³ ‘Мей, София Григорьевна’ [Mei, Sofia Grigorievna]. In *Русский энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона* [Brokhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary], edited by Konstantin Arseniev and Fedor Petrushevskii, 945. St. Petersburg, 1896. http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/ЭСБЕ/Мей,_Софья_Григорьевна. [Мей Софья Григорьевна, рожденная Полянская – писательница (1820-1889), жена поэта, во втором браке Рехневская; издавала с 1862 по 1881 г. «Модный магазин», где писала статьи о модах].

¹¹⁴ ‘When great male masters die, the press dedicates numerous pages in their tribute. In contrast, Muratova received just a couple of lines in the main national newspapers’. See ‘Introduction’, 6.

Another source of information is a biographic note included in *Russkii biographicheskii slovar'* [Russian bibliographic dictionary] of 1913.¹¹⁵ Some of the richest sources of insider information on Sofia Grigorievna are the memoirs written by A[nna] G[rigorievna] Polianskaia, one of Sofia's younger sisters. They were published in 1911 in the famous pre-revolutionary historical review *Russkaia starina*, with the title 'To the Biography of L.A. [Lev Aleksandrovich] Mei' and a subtitle 'Lev Aleksandrovich and Sofia Grigorievna Mei, Their Relatives and Acquaintances. (A Family Chronicle)', which was probably an initial title given by the author herself. This long chronicle was published in three consecutive issues and contained a lot of information on the woman. The biggest archival collection of varied materials related to Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei is preserved in the manuscript section of the St. Petersburg Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House).¹¹⁶ It contains some materials related to the publishing and philanthropic activities of Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, personal correspondence, and a biographical note handwritten by Anna Polianskaia in 1899, on the tenth anniversary of Sofia Grigorievna's death. In contrast to the above-mentioned note titled by *Russkaia starina* 'For the biography of L.A. Mei', this four-page manuscript focuses solely on Sofia Grigorievna and, in particular, on the second part of her life, which is not covered in the 'Family Chronicle'. It has never been published and, if the (absent) data on the reader's list is accurate, has never before been seen by a scholar. Several archival documents related to Mei's activity as a publisher were found in the archives of the Central Censorship authority; some of them were previously consulted by Christine Ruane and Carolyn Marks and later mentioned in their works.

The biographical information on Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei is predictably fragmented; different sources contain different sorts of data, and the only two biographical notes were published at the end of the nineteenth century, right after her death. Seventy years of Soviet historiography were characterized by a biased focus towards events related to the socialist revolution and the neglect of other aspects of socio-cultural history. As a result, for more than a hundred years this woman's life was almost completely forgotten while her work was either ignored or attributed to other, more widely-known people from her surroundings. Nevertheless, these historical sources, however limited, when brought together constitute a comparatively broad and varied corpus sufficient for reconstructing not only main life events but also a psychological portrait of Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei. In the following chapter, I bring together fragmented pieces of information and data from the above-mentioned sources and recreate Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's

¹¹⁵ 'Рехневская, София Григорьевна' [Rekhnevskaiia, Sofia Grigorievna]. In *Русский биографический словарь* [Russian biographical dictionary] Vol. 16, 145. Imperial Russian Historical Society Publishing, 1913.

¹¹⁶ 'Рехневская-Мей, София Григорьевна' [Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, Sofia Grigorievna], f. 257. 1861-1888. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House).

comprehensive biography. I particularly focus on those aspects of her personal experience which shaped her habitus, symbolic capital, and expertise as an editor. The chapter ends with the identifying her socio-cultural role in the framework of the center-periphery model (in cultural and social terms).

1.1 Sofia Polianskaia (1822-1850): Socio-cultural background

Born in Moscow into an old gentry family, Sofia Grigor'ievna Polianskaia, as evidenced by *Istoricheskii vestnik* [Historical Herald] of 1889, 'received an excellent education and spent her youth amongst the best of society'.¹¹⁷ The memoirs written by her younger sister Anna Polianskaia and published in 1911 in *Russkaia starina* are unique evidence which provides insider information on the socio-cultural background, upbringing, and personality of the future editor of *Modnyi magazin*. Both of her parents, born into old gentry families of the Tambov and Moscow provinces, were educated in the Western manner typical for the Russian nobility: they lived in a beautifully-decorated estate with many learned servants, spoke French, appreciated art and music, and had their own home theatre. This was a love marriage with many children, of whom Sofia was the eldest daughter. When Sofia Grigorievna was eight, she was sent to St. Petersburg to live with her aunt Ekaterina Mikhailovna Shlykova (born Polianskaia). A widow without children, she was spending her old age at the estate of a good friend of both hers and the entire Polianskiys family, the famous and influential court lady Ekaterina Aleksandrovna Arkharova (1755-1836), also a widow.¹¹⁸ When inviting Sofia to St. Petersburg, the two women suggested that her parents take care of the girl's upbringing and provide her with the best metropolitan education possible. Since Sofia was still too young to be sent to the gymnasium, 'they invited teachers for her preparation, while French was taught to her by a former student of the Smolnyi monastery'.¹¹⁹ When the time

¹¹⁷ 'Материалы к биографии Софьи Григорьевны Рехневской-Мей' [Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigor'ievna Rekhnevskai-Mei], *Русская старина* [Russian Old Times], 4 February 1889. F. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. The Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House); 'Смесь' [Miscellanea], *Исторический вестник* [Historical herald] 36, no. 4, 1889. <https://runivers.ru/lib/book9629/>.

¹¹⁸ Ekaterina Shlykova was 'indescribably happy with the arrival of her little niece and granddaughter, who started to call her "mama"' [несказанно счастлива приезде своей маленькой племянницы и внучки, которая стала называть ее «мамой»] Anna Polianskaia, 'К биографии Л.А. Мей' [To the Biography of L.A. Mei], *Русская старина* [Russian Old Times], vol. 148, 1911, 684.

¹¹⁹ Located at the Smolnyi monastery, the prestigious *Smolnyi Noble girls Institute* was the first Russian school for girls, having been established in 1764 by Catherine the Great with the aim of raising a new generation of educated and well-mannered women. The former female students of this school were known for their excellent language proficiency and sophisticated worldly manners; Anna Polianskaia, 'К биографии Л.А. Мей' [To the Biography of L.A. Mei], *Russkaia Starina*, no. 10 (1911): 674. [для подготовки пригласили учителей, а французским языком занялась с ней [...] воспитанница Смольного монастыря].

came to go to the school, 'after the prayer service, Ekaterina Aleksandrovna [Arkharova] herself solemnly took her foster-daughter to the *Ekaterinine Institute [for Gentry-girls]*'.¹²⁰

As described by her sister, Sofia received a solid elementary education and stood out among other girls in the gymnasium because of her 'outstanding abilities'.¹²¹ However, while there the girl developed a strong case of anaemia and had to leave the boarding school. Then Ekaterina Arkharova suggested that Sofia continue her education privately, together with her own granddaughters. One of Arkharova's daughters was married to a wealthy and famous nobleman of St. Petersburg high society, Prince Aleksei Vasilchikov.¹²² His wife and Arkharova's daughter, Aleksandra Ivanovna, was a court lady known for being obsessed with the upbringing and education of her four children, 'for whom she, already at a young age, abandoned all her social visits and for whom she provided the best tutors of the time'.¹²³ Requested by her mother, she invited Sofia Polianskaia to study together with young princesses Anna and Ekaterina. Polianskaia describes how Sofia spent days in Vasilchikov's house and, equally with their daughters, benefitted from the best private education available at the time to Russian girls. Anna Polianskaia stresses that Vasilchikov's influence over her sister's upbringing went beyond the merely intellectual domain: 'apart from a scientific education, Sonia [Sofia] saw in Aleksandra Ivanovna the most exalted example of spiritual purity and compassion to people'.¹²⁴ After Sofia grew up, the influential Vasilchikovs continued to be involved in her life.

When Sofia was sixteen, her idyllic life changed abruptly: Aleksandra Archipova and Sofia's aunt Ekaterina Shlykova, both in their eighties, died consecutively and the Vasilchikovs decided to move to Europe for a few years. Having no one left in St. Petersburg to stay with, Sofia had to return to her parents' estate. Her sister points out that this was a traumatizing experience for the girl, who at once lost her loved ones and was deprived of the splendid lifestyle of St. Petersburg's high society, which had already become habitual for her. Nonetheless, when Sofia returned home, her father, who loved her the most among his children, ensured that she continue her education and hired an English governess and 'all the necessary tutors' for her.¹²⁵ Furthermore, he sold their family property, Kashyn, in order to move to Moscow, where his daughters would

¹²⁰ Ibid, 675. [Отслужили молебен, Екатерина Александровна сама торжественно отвезла свою воспитанницу в Екатерининский институт].

¹²¹ Ibid. [выдающиеся способности].

¹²² Vasilchikov is an old noble family name.

¹²³ Polianskaia, 'To the Biography of L.A. Mei', 686. [для которых она отказалась от всех выездов, еще в молодые годы и которым она предоставляла лучших учителей того времени].

¹²⁴ Ibid, 687. [Кроме научного образования, Соня видела в лице Александры Ивановна самый возвышенный пример чистоты душевной и сострадания к людям].

¹²⁵ Ibid, 690. [Возвратясь в родительский дом, Софья Григорьевна продолжила свое образование. Отец взял для нее гувернантку-англичанку и всех нужных учителей].

have a wider social entourage (his sons were already studying in Moscow). Overall, the chronicler argues, Sofia Polianskaia received ‘a quite serious scientific education, knew English and French well, and was an excellent musician’.¹²⁶ Anna Polianskaia remembers her sister’s ‘calm and focused facial expression’ which gave her beautiful face a certain uniqueness and describes a special attitude which the girl inspired in others, both within the family and in their social circle:

Clever, gifted, graceful, she attracted everyone’s attention. [...] She stood out sharply among her female peers, and it would have taken a rare young man, after having met herto have been carried away by her. Sofia Grigorievna at an early age got used to being surrounded by admirers; she took their love as a fair tribute to her intelligence and beauty, but she herself did not yet love anyone.¹²⁷

It was in Moscow that Sofia Grigorievna met a young poet, Lev Aleksandrovich Mei (1822 – 1862). Born into ‘an impoverished gentry family of Russified Germans’, he first studied in the Moscow Gentry Institute.¹²⁸ In reward for outstanding academic results, he was offered a state-subsidized place at the prestigious Tsarskoselskiy Lyceum in St. Petersburg. After his graduation in 1841, Lev Mei returned to Moscow and started to earn his living as a junior official in the Governor General’s office.¹²⁹ At this time, as evidenced by *Russkaia starina*, he ‘became an almost daily visitor of the Polianskiys, who for a long time maintained a relationship with his family’.¹³⁰ A.G. Polianskaia maintains that, more than an old friendship or anything else, it was Mei’s affection for Sofia that was bringing him to their house. One of his early poems, written in 1844 and called *Oktavy* [Octaves], is dedicated ‘to S.G. P[oliansk]aia’. Written in the form of an imaginary input to Sofia’s album, it presents his vision of Sofia’s personality. After saying that he had heard about her, he describes his own version of that ‘curious and incoherent’ story:

First I thought that you were a coquette,
Then – that you were way too proud;
But now I know: you do your thing,

¹²⁶ Ibid. [Софья Григорьевна получила весьма серьезное научное образование; хорошо знала английский и французский языки; была прекрасной музыкантшей].

¹²⁷ Ibid, 689. [Умная, даровитая, изящная, она обращала на себя всеобщее внимание. [...] Она резко выделялась из среды своих сверстниц, и редко кто из молодых людей, узнав ее, не увлекся бы ею. Софья Григорьевна рано привыкла видеть себя окруженною поклонниками, любовь их она принимала за должную дань ее уму и красоте, - но сама еще никого не любила].

¹²⁸ ‘Miscellanea’, *Historical Herald*, 253. [Из обедневших дворян обрусевшей немецкой фамилии].

¹²⁹ Kseniia Buchmeyer, ‘Лев Александрович Мей’ [Lev Aleksandrovich Mei], Moscow: Soviet Russia, 1985. http://az.lib.ru/m/mej_l_a/text_0040.shtml.

¹³⁰ ‘Miscellanea’, *Historical Herald*, 253. [Когда Лев Александрович Мей вышел из Царскосельского лицея и приехал в Москву, он сделался почти ежедневным посетителем Полянских, которые с давних пор находились в отношениях с его семьей’].

But you're a girl with reason and with soul.
 And I like you, but not because
 You're kind, good-looking:
 [...]
 I like you, as an exception
 among women, namely because
 you knew how to temper the rush
 and fervour of feelings with the intellect,
 Because you, too, despise
 society's perceptions, talks, and rumours,
 because you comprehend the mysteries of art,
 the voice of truth and feelings.¹³¹

This representation of Mei corresponds to the portrait drawn by Anna Polianskaia. Sofia Grigorievna, who was intrigued by the imagination of her surroundings, was seen by Mei 'as an exception among women' because of her strong personality, independent thinking, and artistic sense. Their love-story, 'full of drama', lasted for almost ten years, and a cycle of poems inspired by Sofia and dedicated to her constitutes the most significant part of Mei's early literary legacy.¹³²

1.2 Sofia Mei (1850-1864): 'The wife of a poet'

¹³¹ Lev Mei, 'Октавы' [Octaves], in *Лев Мей. Избранные произведения* [Lev Mei. Selected Works] (Petersburg: Biblioteka poeta, 1872) 60-62.

[Сначала думал я, что вы кокетка,
 Потом, что вы — уж чересчур горды;
 Теперь узнал: вы заняты собою,
 Но девушка с рассудком и душою.
 И нравитесь вы мне, но не за то,
 Что вы любезны, хороши собою:
 [...]

Но вы мне нравитесь, как исключенье
 Из женщин, именно за то, что вы
 Умели обуздать в себе стремленье
 И пылкость чувств работой головы,
 За то, что есть и в вас пренебрежение
 К понятиям света, говору молвы,
 Что вам доступны таинства искусства,
 Понятен голос истины и чувства.

¹³² Dmitrieva, E. 'Лев Мей' [Lev Mei]. In *Русские поэты. Антология русской поэзии в 6-ти т.* [Russian poets. Antology of Russian poetry in 6 volumes]. Moscow: Children's literature, 1996. <http://poetrylibrary.ru/stixiya/644.html>. [полная драмы]; Buchmeyer, 'Лев Александрович Мей'; Kormilov, Sergei. 'Мей Лев Александрович' [Mei Lev Aleksandrovich]. In *Русские писатели. Библиографический словарь* [Russian writers. Bibliographic dictionary], edited by P. Nikolaev, Vol. 2. Moscow: Prosveshchenie Publishing House, 1990. http://az.lib.ru/m/mej_1_a/text_0100.shtml.

On the 30th of April 1850, Sofia Grigor'ievna, in her late twenties, married Lev Mei, one year younger than her.¹³³ As recounted by her sister, the wedding's attendees were 'magnificent' [блистательный],¹³⁴ with Prince Aleksandr Vasil'chikov and Countess Evdokiia Rostopchina actively partaking in the ceremony as guests of honour.¹³⁵ Countess Rostopchina was one of the key female figures in the Moscow literary world; she was a poet and intellectual, a close friend of Aleksandr Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov. In the 1840s, 'all the brightest of Moscow *intelligentsia*' gathered at her literary salon, and Lev Mei was among her most frequent guests.¹³⁶ By the late 1840s, Mei became a figure widely known among Russian writers, especially after 1849 when he wrote the poetic drama *Tsarskaia nevesta* [Tsar's Bride], which became a big success with the critics and the public alike.¹³⁷ In 1850, the newly-weds went to St. Petersburg to watch its staging, and, thanks to countess Rostopchina's efforts, the entire royal family and the court were present in the theater. Already in the years before their marriage, Mei had actively participated in Moscow's intensified literary life, which was closely intertwined with the developing world of periodical publishing. In the late 1840s, Mei joined a so-called 'young editorial board' of the literary journal, *Moscovitianin* [Muscovite], of Mikhail Pogodin and became an editor of its Russian and foreign literature section.¹³⁸ Despite ten years of service at the Moscow office of the Governor General, Lev Mei did not get a career post within the state service.¹³⁹ After a few other attempts to secure a state service position, Meis moved to St. Petersburg in the early 1850s, where Lev Aleksandrovich dedicated himself entirely to his literary occupation.¹⁴⁰

Their move to St. Petersburg coincided with the start of the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881), who became the last big reformer among the Russian monarchs. Inaugurated after the shameful defeat of Russia in the Crimean War, he initiated a range of massive socio-economic reforms aimed at the quick modernization of the Empire: the so-called Era of Great Reforms, which lasted for approximately a decade, from 1855 to the mid-1860s. In order to benefit from the contribution of intellectuals to the much-needed modernization of the country, the traditionally severe censorship of the autocratic state was temporarily loosened during these years; this relative

¹³³ 'Miscellanea', *Historical Herald*, 253.

¹³⁴ Polianskaia, 'To the Biography of L.A. Mei', 91.

¹³⁵ The groom's 'Godmother', or a female guest of honour [посаженная мать] was countess Evdokiia Rostopchina and the bride's 'Godfather', or a male guest of honour (Godfather) [посаженный отец] was prince Vasilchikov, See Polianskaia, 'To the Biography of L.A. Mei'.

¹³⁶ Buchmeyer, 'Лев Александрович Мей'. [весь цвет московской интеллигенции].

¹³⁷ In 1899 Nikolai Rimski-Korsakov created an opera after it, which is still included in the main programs of the Russia's major opera houses.

¹³⁸ Buchmeyer, 'Лев Александрович Мей'. [отделы русской и иностранной словесности].

¹³⁹ Semen Wengerov, 'Мей Л.А.' [Mei L.A.], в *Русский энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона* [Brokhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary], edited by Konstantin Arseniev and Fedor Petrushevskii (St. Petersburg, 1911) http://www.az.lib.ru/w/wengerow_s_a/text_0020.shtml.

¹⁴⁰ Dmitrieva, 'Лев Мей', <http://poetrylibrary.ru/stixiya/644.html>.

freedom of speech allowed journalists and literati to bring up and discuss different social problems. At this time the Meis found themselves in the middle of a vibrant literary life in the capital. Already known for his *Tsarskaia nevesta*, Lev Mei was well received in the St. Petersburg intellectual and artistic circles, which allowed him and Sofia to establish many contacts in the literary and publishing fields. Together they started to host their own literary-artistic salon, which became very popular:

The Meis' house was filled with writers. There one could meet Maikov, Polonskiy, Shcherbina, Gerbel, Danilov, Pisemskiy, Potiakhin, Maksimov, Kuprichkin, Turgenev, Goncharov, Druzhynin, A. Grigoriev, Krestovskiy, Sluchaevskiy, Minaev, Smedolin, Golovin and many others. Who of the literati of the 1850s and the beginning of the 1860s does not remember L.A. [Lev Aleksandrovich] and Sofia Grigorievna, their lively soirées and genial receptions?¹⁴¹

Lev Mei published his original works and translations in almost all the major journals, whose ideological standpoints ranged from the official to the liberal-democratic discourse: *Biblioteka dl'ia chteniia*, *Otechestvennye zapiski*, *Syn otiechestva*, *Russkoe slovo*, *Russkiy mir*, *Svietoch*, *Sovremennik*. *Iskra*, *Narodnoe slovo* and others.¹⁴² A gifted translator, well-educated and proficient in ten languages,¹⁴³ he belonged to the first generation of Russian professional translators to emerge in the 1850-1860s triggered by the broadening of the readership beyond the well-educated nobility. Lev Aleksandrovich equally masterfully translated into Russian authors as diverse as Byron, Heine, Goethe, Hugo, Dickens, Milton, Mickiewicz, Shakespeare, Schiller, Anacreon, and Theocritus, as well as old Slavic legends and folk songs. In this way, he substantially contributed to making Western European literature accessible to the 'new' Russian reader commonly not proficient in foreign languages.¹⁴⁴ Sofia Mei's publishing experience also started with contributions of translations and smaller literary pieces to Russian journals. It was during their life in St. Petersburg that she published her first literary works: 'in *Syn ot'iechestva* [Son of the Fatherland] in March 1859, a short story "Bezdel'ie" [Idleness] under the pseudonym E. and in *Biblioteka dl'ia chteniia* [Library for Reading], a translation of a novel by Thackeray, as

¹⁴¹ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [Дом Меев наполнился литераторами. У них можно было встретить: Майкова, Полонского, Щербину, Гербяля, Данилова, Писемского, Потяхина, Максимова, Купричкина, Тургенева, Гончарова, Дружинина, А. Григорьеву, Крестовского, Случевского, Минаева, Смедолина, Головина и многих многих других. Кто из литераторов 50-х и начала 60-х не помнит Л.А. и Софьи Григорьевны, их оживленных вечеров и радушных приемов].

¹⁴² Wengerov, 'Mei L.A.'. http://az.lib.ru/w/wengerow_s_a/text_0020.shtml.

¹⁴³ Kseniia Buchmeyer, 'Л.А. Мей' [L.A. Mei], in *Лев Мей. Избранные произведения* [Lev Mei. Selected Works], Petersburg: Biblioteka poeta, 1872. https://imwerden.de/pdf/mei_izbrannye_proizvedeniya_1972__ocr.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ Solomon Reyser, 'Л.А. Мей' [L.A. Mei], *История русской литературы: В 10 т.* [History of Russian literature in ten volumes], Vol. 8, part 2 (Moscow: Academy of Sciences Publishing, 1956), 309.

well as several short stories from the French chronicles', as she herself indicates later in her petition to launch her magazine.¹⁴⁵

Although exceptionally lively and gregarious, the Meis' life was far from easy. *Istoricheskii vestnik* tells us that Sofia 'married a poet, Mei, and for ten years shared a hard life with him, since he did not have a stable income and lived only from what he earned with his work'.¹⁴⁶ However, the core of the problem was Lev Mei's personality and lifestyle, which eventually brought them misery. As contended by Buchmeyer, 'the memoirs of his contemporaries picture Mei as a very kind, femininely gentle but disorganized person and a heavy drinker'.¹⁴⁷ In Moscow, during the years when he participated in editing *Moscovitianin*, he developed 'a painful addiction to wine',¹⁴⁸ which hindered further development of his literary career. Despite Sofia Mei's hopes that moving to St. Petersburg would help her husband overcome his addiction and their poverty, things just got worse: 'Utterly disordered and childishly improvident, Mei was living the messy life of the literary "bohème"'.¹⁴⁹ Several times Mei tried to realize his dream and launch his own journal, but all attempts 'invariably ended in failure and earned Mei fame as an unfortunate journalist'.¹⁵⁰ In April 1856, Russian poet Apollon Nikolaievich Maikov (1821-1897) sent a letter to novelist Aleksey Fiofelaktovich Pisemskiy (1821-1881) in Astrakhan in which he describes the lively and vibrant – 'merry' – atmosphere of St. Petersburg literary circles and mentions the key news 'which determined the tone of everything': the tsar's permission to publish new journals, among which was Mei's *Rossiia* [Russia].¹⁵¹ However, Maikov finishes his update with an ironic description of an incident that happened during one of the art 'evenings' hosted by architect A.I. Shtakenshneider, in which Lev Mei ('editor of a future journal') 'in a drunk condition insulted a young lady and started a hand-

¹⁴⁵ 'Дело об издании журнала' [On publishing the journal], RGIA, f. 777, op. 2, d. 80, l. 73. [При сем ... присовокуплен, что мою напечатаны: в «Сыне Отечества» в марте 1859 года рассказ «Безделье» под псевдонимом Е.: и в «Библиотеке для чтения» перевод романа Теккерея «и несколько рассказов из французских хроник].

¹⁴⁶ 'Miscellanea, *Historical Herald*, 253. [вышла за поэта Мея и десять лет делила с ним тяжелую жизнь, так как он не имел никаких постоянных доходов и жил только тем, что зарабатывал своим трудом].

¹⁴⁷ Buchmeyer, 'Mei L.A.', in *Mei L.A. Poems*, 1. [Воспоминания современников рисуют Мея очень добрым, женственно мягким, но безалаберным и сильно пьющим человеком].

¹⁴⁸ Wengerov, 'Mei L.A.'. [болезненное пристрастие к вину].

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. [Крайне безалаберный и детски нерасчетливый, Мей жил беспорядочной жизнью литературной "богеми"].

¹⁵⁰ At different times, it was *Rossiia, vremennik otechestvennykh sobytii, slovesnosti, nauki, iskusstv i khudozhestva* [Russia, a Herald of National News, Literature, Science, and Arts], *Listok dlia gramotnogo l'iuda* [A Paper for Educated People], *Mirskoe slovo* [Secular Word]. Furthermore, he tried to become a publisher of *Syn otechestva* [The Son of the Fatherland]. Reyser, 'Л.А. Мей' [неизменно кончались неудачами и создали Мею славу неудачливого журналиста].

¹⁵¹ Appolon Maikov. 'Майков А.Н. – Писемскому А.Ф.' [Maikov A.N. to Pisemskiy A.F.]. April 1856. <http://maykov.lit-info.ru/maykov/pisma/letter-6.htm>. [задали тон всему]

to-hand fight with a painter'.¹⁵² The architect's daughter, E.A. Shtakenshneider, mentions this story in her diary: 'again we had a stupid story with Mei'.¹⁵³ She describes how the argument suddenly turned into a fight 'but here Sofia Grigorievna Mei came running and managed, with the help of others, to take her husband away'.¹⁵⁴ In a compassionate attempt to explain the poet's behaviour, Shtakenshneider adds that Lev Aleksandrovich is 'very sweet and, of course, quite decent and knows how to behave in any society, but he, alas, is possessed by a vice: he drinks'.¹⁵⁵

Simon Wengerov, who wrote the biographical note on Lev Mei for *Brockhaus & Efron's Biographical Dictionary* in 1911, recounts how: 'large decanters [of wine] were undermining Mei's health and, at times, brought him utter misery. In severe frosts, he would sit in an unheated apartment, and once, to warm himself, he chopped an expensive wardrobe of his wife's for firewood'.¹⁵⁶ However, Anna Polianskaia's 'family chronicle' refutes this evidence as a rumour: 'Nothing like this has ever happened',¹⁵⁷ she writes, explaining that all Sofia's dowry (of which that closet arguably was a part) was sold when the Meis left Moscow. Rumour or not, this story illustrates the level of misery that Meis reached in St. Petersburg. Reyser explains: 'if the years in Moscow were years of materially strained life, then the decade spent in Petersburg could not be characterized other than hungry'.¹⁵⁸ In addition to Mei's own financial need, Anna Polianskaia explains how in those years her and Sofia's father, 'because of the naivety of his character, lost his fortune'.¹⁵⁹ She also points out that 'despite all the troubles, Sofia Grigorievna did not lose her presence spirit, she earned money on the side not only with lessons, but even with fine needlework, in which she was quite talented'.¹⁶⁰

In 1860, after his last attempt to launch a journal failed (this time, *Mirskoe slovo* [Secular World]), Lev's friend Aleksandr Ivanovich Koshelev, a famous publicist and Slavophile, suggested that he publish a full collection of his works.¹⁶¹ Lev Aleksandrovich started to work

¹⁵² See Elena Shtakenshneider, *Дневник и записки 1854-1886*. [Notebook and notes 1854-1886] (Moscow: Academia Publishing, 1934), 125.

¹⁵³ Ibid. [У нас опять была глупая история с Меем].

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. [но тут прибежала Софья Григорьевна Мей, и ей удалось увезти, с помощью других, своего мужа].

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. [премилый и, конечно, вполне приличный и умеющий себя вести во всяком обществе, но он, увы, одержим пороком, он пьет].

¹⁵⁶ Wengerov, 'Mei L.A.'. [Большие графины расшатывали здоровье Мей и порой доводили его до совершенной нищеты. Он сидел в лютые морозы в нетопленной квартире и, чтобы согреться, раз разрубил на дрова дорогой шкаф жены].

¹⁵⁷ Polianskaia, 'To the Biography of L.A. Mei', 78. [Ничего подобного никогда не было].

¹⁵⁸ Reyser, 'L.A. Mei', 304. [Если годы жизни в Москве были годами стесненной материально жизни, то десятилетие, прожитое в Петербурге, нельзя охарактеризовать иначе, как голодное].

¹⁵⁹ Polianskaia, 'Biography of S.G. Rekhnevskia', f. 257, d. 88. [по доверчивости своего характера, потерял все свое состояние].

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. [Несмотря на все невзгоды Софья Григорьевна не теряла присутствия духа, она со своей стороны зарабатывала не только уроками (музыки), но и даже изящными рукоделиями, до которых была большая мастерица].

¹⁶¹ Buchmeyer, 'L.A. Mei', in *Mei L.A. Poems*, 5.

intensely on preparing the three-volume collection, which, he hoped, would allow him to earn a substantial sum. It was at this time that ‘in order to support her husband, Sofia Grigorievna got the idea to publish a fashion magazine’.¹⁶² *Istoricheskii vestnik* explains Mei’s intention as being ‘absent of any means of subsistence’.¹⁶³ Reyser describes this moment in the following way: ‘By the beginning of the 1860s, the situation became totally catastrophic. [...] Mei’s wife took care of ensuring their material well-being and [...] started publishing a journal, *Modnyi magazin*’.¹⁶⁴ At this time, Sofia Mei had just turned forty and not only had sufficient connections in the publishing field to launch her journal, but also, unlike her husband, had the perseverance and practical approach necessary for such an endeavor.

The initial capital for starting a magazine was collected through ‘a loan from the Literary foundation [Society for the Support of Writers and Scientists in Need]¹⁶⁵ and by borrowing from friends’;¹⁶⁶ in particular, according to Polianskaia, ‘two thousand rubles from her childhood friend, for start-up costs’.¹⁶⁷ The official name of the so-called ‘Literary foundation’ was the Society for the Support of Writers and Scientists in Need, as envisaged by writer, translator and literary critic Aleksandrs Vasilievich Druzhynin (1824-1864) as a Russian version of the British Literary Fund.¹⁶⁸ The Society’s emergence was closely related to the gradual professionalization of journalism in Russia and the advent of a literary *intelligentsia* who earned its living through writing and publishing. Founded in St. Petersburg in 1859, it aimed, apart from supporting writers, ‘to facilitate the publication of new useful literary works’.¹⁶⁹ Among the leading members of the Society were the representatives of the most famous St. Petersburg journals (*Sovremennik*, *Otechestvennye zapiski*, *Biblioteka dl’ia chteniia* and others), among them Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Chernyshevskiy and Konstantin Kavelin, and later joined by Nikolai Nekrasov, Fiodor Dostoevskiy, Ivan Goncharov, Aleksey Pisemskiy and many others. *Russkaia starina* claims that

¹⁶² Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’, 74-75. [чтобы поддержать мужа, Софье Григорьевна пришла в голову идея издавать журнал].

¹⁶³ ‘Miscellanea, *Historical Herald*, 253. [отсутствие всяких средств к существованию].

¹⁶⁴ Reyser, ‘L.A. Mei’, 304. [К началу 60-х годов положение стало совершенно катастрофическим. [...] За устройство материального благосостояния взялась жена Мея [...] издавать журнал «Модный магазин»].

¹⁶⁵ R.K. ‘Литературный фонд’ [Literary Foundation]. In *Литературная энциклопедия* [Literary Encyclopaedia], Vol. 6, 474-477. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1932. <http://feb-web.ru/feb/litenc/encyclop/le6/le6-4741.htm>

¹⁶⁶ Anatoliy Dolivo-Dobrovolskiy, and Natalia Kharlamova, *Санкт-Петербург. Хроника трех столетий* [Saint-Peterburg. A chronicle of three centuries] (St. Petersburg: Neva Publishing House, 2003), 408. [На ссуду от Литературного фонда и одолженные у друзей деньги].

¹⁶⁷ Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’, 75. [заняла у друга своего детства две тысячи рублей, для первоначальных расходов].

¹⁶⁸ See R.K. ‘Literary Foundation’, *Literary Encyclopaedia*, 474-477.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 474. [способствовать изданию в свет полезных литературных трудов].

‘Sofia Grigorievna was a member of the Society for the Support of Writers and Scientists in Need – and the most active member’.¹⁷⁰

In 1861, Sofia Mei petitioned the Central Censorship Authority with a request to publish a fashion magazine. She wrote the program herself and attached it to her petition: she envisaged publishing reviews of Parisian and St. Petersburg fashion news, detailed descriptions of the latest fashion models, social life reviews (social feuilletons), various literary pieces (short stories, poems, historical notes, etc.), and household tips. Mei’s program also included the provision of illustrative material taken primarily from Parisian sources (e.g., twelve colored fashion plates per year by the famous illustrator Jules David). The program was approved, and the first issue of *Modnyi magazin* was published on 1 January 1862. All historical sources emphasize that the magazine immediately had big success and quickly became popular and commercially viable, which allowed the Meis to improve their financial situation.¹⁷¹ Not only, as Reyser explains, did ‘the Meis gradually begin paying back their multiple debts’, but also, as described by Polianskaia, her sister ‘with her earned money, could provide for her parents’.¹⁷² When their parents died, Sofia Grigorievna also supported Anna, her unmarried younger sister, until she found a job.

Polianskaia argues that Lev Aleksandrovich ‘most enthusiastically took part in his wife’s journal’ and contributed to it with his translations.¹⁷³ Thus, the very first issue contains his translation of Charles Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* and the poetic interpretation of a German legend. According to *Istoricheskii vestnik*, ‘the journal went very well and allowed for the improvement of their constrained financial conditions’.¹⁷⁴ Ironically, just when things began to improve, Lev Mei’s health, ‘weakened by work, misery, and wine, broke down’.¹⁷⁵ In mid-May, in the midst of working on his collection and just four months after the first issue of his wife’s journal, Lev Mei, forty years old, suddenly died from catarrhal pneumonia and the lung paralysis caused by it. As claimed in the *Bibliographical Dictionary*’s note on Lev Mei, an ‘unhealthy bohemian way of life turned out to be fatal for him’.¹⁷⁶ Just a few hours before he died, he finished translating a French

¹⁷⁰ ‘Miscellanea, *Historical Herald*, 253. [Софья Григорьевна была членом Общества для пособия нуждающимся литераторам и ученым» и самым деятельным членом]. However, since there is no other evidence of Sofie Mei’s membership or, especially, her particular activity in this organization, it is possible that the author of this evidence confused it with the Society for the Support of Poor Women, which is addressed later in this subchapter.

¹⁷¹ See ‘Miscellanea, *Historical Herald*, 253. Buchmeyer, ‘Lev Aleksandrovich Mei; Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’.

¹⁷² Reyser, ‘L.A. Mei’, 304. [Меи начали постепенно расплачиваться с многочисленными долгами]; Polianskaia, ‘Biography of S.G. Rekhnevskaiia’ [она могла на свои трудовые деньги содержать своих родителей].

¹⁷³ Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’, 74. [принимал самое живое участие в издании жены].

¹⁷⁴ ‘Miscellanea, *Historical Herald*, 253. [Журнал пошел очень хорошо и дал возможность поправить стесненные финансовые обстоятельства].

¹⁷⁵ Dolivo-Dobrovolskiy, *Санкт-Петербург. Хроника трех столетий*, 408. [подточенное трудами, невзгодами и вином, не выдержало].

¹⁷⁶ Kormilov, ‘Mei Lev Aleksandrovich’. [нездоровый божемный образ жизни оказался для него губительным].

short story for *Modnyi magazin*, ‘so as not to delay [the publication of] an issue’.¹⁷⁷ Polianskaia writes that her sister was ‘struck by the death of her husband and collapsed dangerously’.¹⁷⁸ For a few weeks she stayed at one of her close female friend's and then moved to a country house in Pavlovsk.¹⁷⁹ Polianskaia explains that, by that time, ‘*Modnyi magazin* was already going so well that Sofia Grigorievna could bury Lev Aleksandrovich at her own expense and over time paid some of his debts’.¹⁸⁰

1.3 Sofia Rekhnevskaja (1864-1889): Publisher, editor, and social activist

Two years after Lev Mei's death, Sofia Mei married for the second time. Although there is no information on how she met her second husband, he, like Lev Mei, was well-educated and had an intellectual occupation. Born into a gentry family from the Minsk province, Colonel Stanislav-Kasimir Simonovich Rekhnevskiy (1833-1885) was ‘a scientific officer of the General Staff, who was doing mathematical research’.¹⁸¹ Twelve years younger than his wife, he received his education at St. Petersburg Main Engineering College, which he finished with distinction. In 1858, he was appointed professor of geodesy at the prestigious Imperial (Nikolaev) Military Academy. A member of the Military Scientific Committee of the General Staff, he was doing research and had published a book and several scientific articles on, among other topics, retirement pensions for military personnel. As described by *Istoricheskii vestnik*, after marrying Rekhnevskiy, Sofia Grigorievna did not need to work to earn a living but continued to publish her magazine and work hard on it ‘out of love of the occupation’.¹⁸² According to Polianskaia, these were ‘the best and the happiest years of her life’.¹⁸³

Her marriage to Stanislav Rekhnevskiy brought Sofia Grigorievna financial stability, comfort, and a respectable social standing. In the first twelve years, Rekhnevskiy, according to *Russkaia starina*, ‘spent three to four months [per year] abroad: in Switzerland, in Italy or

¹⁷⁷ Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’, 75. [чтобы не задержать номер].

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 75-76. [Софья Григорьевна была поражена смертью мужа и опасно изнемогла].

¹⁷⁹ It is not clear to whom this house belonged, to the Polianskiys, to the Meis (less probable), or to any of their friends. However, as Pavlovsk was one of the royal summer residences, having a summer house there signified a high social status and, in the first half of the century, almost invariably, the noble origin of its owner.

¹⁸⁰ Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’, 76. [Дела «Модного магазина» были уже настолько хороши, что Софья Григорьевна могла похоронить его на свой счет, а со временем, заплатила некоторые его долги].

¹⁸¹ ‘Miscellanea, *Historical Herald*, 253. [ученого офицера генерального штаба, занимавшегося математическими исследованиями].

¹⁸² Ibid. [За вторым мужем Софья Григорьевна не нуждалась уже в работе для приобретения средств к жизни, но продолжала издавать свой журнал из любви к делу].

¹⁸³ Polianskaia, ‘Biography of S.G. Rekhnevskaja’, f. 257, d. 88. [лучшие и самые счастливые годы своей жизни].

somewhere on the waters [water resorts] but most frequently in Paris'.¹⁸⁴ Anna Polianskaia's note confirms this:

For health as well as for the business of the journal, they went abroad every summer; there they met many female acquaintances from St. Petersburg's high society, some of whom belonged to the charitable circle. Sofia Grigorievna herself had always thought about working for charity and therefore entered the philanthropic Ladies Society for the Support of Poor Women.¹⁸⁵

Charity was a traditional occupation of Russian gentry women, but its form and socio-cultural role changed substantially in the second half of the nineteenth century. The profound socio-economic transformations which followed the reforms of Alexander II left many Russian women without any means of subsistence. In the absence of sufficient state support, women's private charitable initiatives started to actively take care of their disadvantaged female compatriots. In contrast to traditional individual almsgiving, these initiatives gradually started to acquire a systematic character and a long-term civic agenda, consisting of supporting women in earning their living.¹⁸⁶ They became centered around so-called circles and societies. Her own financial stability allowed Sofia Grigorievna to become an active member of one such society, the Society for the Support of Poor Women in St. Petersburg [Общество пособия бедным женщинам в Санкт-Петербурге]. The Society functioned as an umbrella organization consisting of nine topical 'circles' dealing with particular matters related to the condition of poor women in the Russian capital, as well as other cities and provinces. It was launched in 1865 and functioned successfully until 1914 (from 1901 it was under the personal patronage of the Empress Maria Fiodorovna, Alexander III's wife).

In the framework of this organization, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei cooperated closely with Anna Pavlovna Filosofova, one of the first and most prominent Russian feminists and initiators of the

¹⁸⁴ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222, Institute of Russian Literature. [В первые 10 или 12 лет их супружества Рехневские проводили 3-4 месяца за границей. В Швейцарии, в Италии или где-нибудь на водах, но чаще всего в Париже].

¹⁸⁵ Polianskaia, 'Biography of S. G. Rekhnevskaiia', f. 257, d. 88, Institute of Russian Literature. [Как для здоровья, также и по делам журнала она каждое лето уезжала за границу; там встречались со многими знакомым дамами Петербургского большого света со многими знакомым дамами Петербургского большого света, из которых некоторые принадлежали к благотворительному кружку. Софья Григорьевна и сама всегда подумывала потрудиться для благотворительности и потому вступила в благотворительное дамское общества для пособия бедным женщинам].

¹⁸⁶ See Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Marina Liborakina, 'Women's voluntarism and philanthropy in pre-revolutionary Russia: building a civil society', *Voluntas* 7, no. 4 (1996): 397-411.

Russian women's movement.¹⁸⁷ 'Committed to projects aimed at economic self-sufficiency for women',¹⁸⁸ this famous noblewoman established the famous Society for Cheap Lodgings (1858-1917), 'the organization that launched the St. Petersburg feminists on their way',¹⁸⁹ as Stites puts it. The above-mentioned Society for the Support of Poor Women was another major philanthropic organization in which she actively engaged. Together, Rekhnevskaja-Mei and Filosofova created and managed one of its first establishments, The Store of Women's Works [Магазин женских изделий] (1864-1881), aimed at supporting women workers in various ways. According to the *Encyclopedia on Charity in Pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg*, it was 'thanks to the efforts of S.G. Rekhnevskaja (the trustee of the shop) and A.P. Filosofova [that] the shop was doing very well': it quickly became an efficient instrument for providing women in need with fairly-paid work in decent conditions.¹⁹⁰ In 1879, Rekhnevskaja resigned from managing the store, which was then taken over by several other female members of the Society. However, after this, the success of the venture started to fade away: 'after the change of leadership [...], the business was doing worse and worse, and, in order to avoid a full depletion of the working capital, it was decided to close the store in 1881'.¹⁹¹ This clearly demonstrates the extent to which the success of any pioneering venture – philanthropic as much as publishing – was determined by the particular skills and individual enthusiasm of a few leading personalities. This was especially true for women when they started to test the boundaries of acceptable female roles and activities in the public domain.

The reason why Rekhnevskaja-Mei, after more than ten years, resigned from managing the store was most probably that, at that particular moment, she was already running a new, much bigger project, one which was growing and required more and more of her time. In 1874, Rekhnevskaja-Mei initiated the creation of one of the Society's working groups, the Ladies' Circle for the Patronage of Working and Studying Girls in St. Petersburg [Кружок для покровительства учащимся и трудящимся девицам]. It specifically targeted young unsheltered girls from the educated classes (primarily orphans graduating from educational institutions) who 'did not have any other means of subsistence except their own labor and who needed both material and moral

¹⁸⁷ She significantly contributed to the progress of women's higher education as well as represented Russian women at the international level.

¹⁸⁸ Norma Noonan and Carol Nechemias, ed, 'Anna Filosofova', in *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 200), 22-24.

¹⁸⁹ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russian: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton university press, 1991), 69.

¹⁹⁰ Tatiana Mniova, 'Общество для пособия бедным женщинам в Санкт-Петербурге' [Society for Support of Poor Women in St.Petersburg], in *Благотворительность в Санкт-Петербурге. 1703-1918. Историческая энциклопедия* [Charity in St.Petersburg. 1703-1918. Historical encyclopaedia], ed. by Andrei Kersum, Oleg Leikind and Dmitriy Severiukhin (St. Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2016). <http://www.encblago.lfond.spb.ru/showObject.do?object=2823337188>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

support'.¹⁹² The Circle initiated by Sofia Grigorievna consisted of 46 members, mostly women, many of whom were 'the female representatives of the high society'.¹⁹³ Among them were Anna Pavlovna Filosofova, Countess Vera Nikolaevna Rostovtseva, and Princess Maria Nikolaevna Volkonskaia. In the beginning, they all gathered in Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's private apartment. Her idea consisted of creating a safe, affordable lodging for girls, as well as providing them with temporary working opportunities. While the project's ultimate goal was to help girls find decent and stable employment in the 'real' job market, the project envisaged the creation of an affiliated sewing atelier and fashion store, 'in order to deliver to them, at a low price, decent accommodation and healthy nutrition, and, furthermore, allow them to earn money to pay for their maintenance'.¹⁹⁴ As argued in the *Encyclopedia on Charity*, this idea was 'original and new for its time [and] belonged to Rekhnevskaiia'.¹⁹⁵ It was supported by other members of the Circle 'outrageously empathetically', and by the end of 1874, funded partly by the Society's money, partly by private donations, Pri'iut Sviatoi Ksenii [St. Ksenia's Shelter] began functioning.¹⁹⁶ During the first two years, it was located in a rented 'luxurious' apartment in the same building as the editorial office of *Modnyi magazin* (at 9 Tolmasov Lane, in the city centre, next to one of the royal residences, Annichkov Palace). The Shelter became the foundation for the micro-infrastructure of a safe and fairly-paid women's work; it engaged local women as tutors, cooks, cleaners, and seamstresses and allowed lodging girls to earn their living and pay for their accommodation. These measures ensured the self-sufficiency of this non-profit enterprise and allowed it to accommodate more and more women. Rekhnevskaiia-Mei put into practice the experience gained during the joint project with Anna Filosofova, and once again it proved its viability.

For almost twelve years since its launch, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei personally managed the Shelter, as well as the affiliated fashion atelier and fashion shop. The correspondence preserved in the archives demonstrates her personal devotion to running the organization, increasing its public outreach, and raising funds. For instance, the archives have preserved Sofia Grigorievna's letter

¹⁹² As explained by Polianskaia, the idea of targeting this particular group of women came to Sofia Grigorievna after an episode in the capital with one gentry-girl (an orphan educated in the state boarding school), who was kicked out of her lodging and had to spend a winter night on the street, having nowhere to go. Polianskaia, 'Биография С.Г. Рехневской', f. 257, d. 88.

¹⁹³ See Mniova, 'Общество для пособия бедным женщинам в Санкт-Петербурге'.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. [доставить им за возможно дешевую плату приличное помещение и здоровую пищу, и кроме того, дать им заработать деньги для уплаты за свое содержание].

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. [оригинальная и новая для своего времени, принадлежала Рехневской].

¹⁹⁶ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. According to Polianskaia, the Shelter was named after the Grand Dutchess Kseniia who was born at the same time when the Shelter was founded. Polianskaia, 'Biography of S.G. Rekhnevskaiia', f. 257, d. 88. [Основание Приюта совпало с днем рождения великой Княжны Ксении Александровны. Софья Григорьевна, радея о будущей приюта, просила Княгиню Куракину (бывшую Гофмейстериню двора, тогда еще Цесаревны Марии Федоровны) просить милостивого разрешения о названии Приюта в честь новорожденной Княжны. Просьба Княгини венчалась успехом].

to Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskiy from 27 October 1880. In this letter, she asked for a private meeting and invited him to participate in the ‘Lermontovskiy evening’ [Лермонтовский вечер], which she organized in order to collect money for the needs of the Shelter.¹⁹⁷ Two sources provide different information on Dostoevskiy’s answer to Rekhnevskaya-Mei’s suggestion: one states that he participated in the event of 22 December 1880 where ‘he, most probably, met Rekhnevskaya’.¹⁹⁸ Another one, referring to Dostoevskiy’s letter to P.I. Weinberg of 2 November 1880, tells that the writer refused and ‘most probably expressed his answer in a written form, as all other similar refusals’.¹⁹⁹ In any case, Rekhnevskaya-Mei’s efforts to engage prominent personalities to partake in her initiative were successful. The Ladies’ Circle and the Shelter created by her existed till the last days of the Russian Empire and were patronized by prominent Russian nobleladies. When Rekhnevskaya-Mei resigned, the Ladies’ Circle was chaired by countess Maria Illarionovna Vorontsova-Dashkova, and later by countess Maria Fiodorovna Sheremeteva.²⁰⁰ From 1893, the Shelter was personally patronized by Grand Duchess Kseniia Aleksandrovna, a daughter of Alexander III and sister of Nicholas II. Kseniia Aleksandrovna petitioned the Military Department to provide the organization with land and facilitated the collecting of funds for the construction of a two-story building able to accommodate up to fifty girls at a time. Nicholas II himself released 15 000 rubles from the State Treasury for this project. Additionally financed through multiple private donations, the new building was opened in 1902, and in 1910 it accommodated up to ninety girls per year. Throughout the forty years of its existence, this initiative supported hundreds of unsheltered Russian women.

Despite its socio-cultural significance (and sufficient historical evidence), Rekhnevskaya-Mei’s philanthropic activity is hardly ever mentioned in the biographical notes related to her. The only exception is *Russkaia starina*, which describes how, for many years, Sofia Grigor’ievna was an active member of the Society for the Support of Poor Women and a founder of St. Kseniia’s Shelter, of which she was elected a chair and which she ‘during more than eleven years [...] tirelessly cared for’.²⁰¹ Despite the assistance of the Ladies Circle and the personal support of the Society’s chair, Iuliia Kurakina, the majority of the duties related to the Shelter’s subsistence and

¹⁹⁷ ‘Рехневская Софья Григорьевна’ [Rekhnevskaya Sofia Grigorievna], *Федор Михайлович Достоевский. Антология жизни и творчества* [Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskiy. The Antology of Life and Work]. Accessed 15 March 2020. http://www.fedordostoevsky.ru/around/Rekhnevskaya_S_G/.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. [22 декабря 1880 г. Достоевский принял участие в этом вечере и скорее всего познакомился с Рехневской].

¹⁹⁹ <http://dostoevskiy-lit.ru/dostoevskiy/pisma-dostoevskogo/nesohranivshiesya/nesohranivshiesya-5.htm> Accessed 15 March 2020. [Достоевский ответил ей отказом, о чем сообщил в письме П. И. Вейнбергу от 2 ноября 1880 г.].

²⁰⁰ See Mniova, ‘Society for Support of Poor Women in St.Petersburg’.

²⁰¹ ‘Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaya-Mei’, f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [о котором больше двенадцати лет [...] неустанно заботилась].

functioning were fulfilled by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei. Polianskaia continues that not all the girls (whose number in the first year had already increased from 15 to 35) were paying their rent accurately but her sister ‘was too indulgent to their flaws, while she herself had to double her care [to support them]’.²⁰² As explained by her sister, it was her strong belief in the necessity of such help that motivated her involvement in this organization:

As a married woman and a publisher of a journal, Sofia Grigorievna had a lot of her own social duties. But, willing to support disadvantaged working women, she got involved in this idea, which she considered sacred, and took on this burden without even realizing how much trouble will be related to these duties.²⁰³

Nevertheless, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei never changed her mind and worked diligently for more than ten years toward the long-term success of this initiative and the well-being of the constantly growing number of its female lodgers: ‘In the beginning, these tasks were not difficult for her. [...] Sofia Grigorievna merrily fulfilled her duties’.²⁰⁴ This started to change in the late 1870s when ‘her dearly beloved husband’²⁰⁵ Stanislav Simonovich, at the age of 45, ‘became seriously ill and had to resign as lieutenant general with the title of Honoured Professor of the Academy’.²⁰⁶ *Istoricheskii vestnik* tells how his illness was related to a mental disease: the source describes how Rekhnevskii spent the last years of his life in a ‘quiet dementia’.²⁰⁷ For many years his wife personally took care of him, until his death in 1885.²⁰⁸ Anna Polianskaia tells that Sofia Grigorievna always had had ‘a huge amount of energy’²⁰⁹ and had been ready to work without a break, but the illness of Rekhnevskii impacted her profoundly:

²⁰² Polianskaia, ‘Biography of S.G. Rekhnevskaiia’, f. 257, d. 88. [слишком снисходительно относилась к их недостаткам, зато сама должна была удваивать свои заботы].

²⁰³ *Ibid.* [Софья Григорьевна как замужняя женщина и как издательница журнала имела множество своих общественных занятий, но [...] увлекается этой идеей, которую она почитала святою, и принимает на себя это бремя, не осознавая как много с этими заботами связано неприятностей].

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* [Сначала ей не тягостны были эти хлопоты. [...] Софья Григорьевна весело исполняла принятую на себя обязанность].

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* [горячо любимый муж].

²⁰⁶ ‘Рехневский, Станислав-Казимир Симонович’ [Rekhnevskaii, Stanislav-Kasimir Simonovich]. In *Русский биографический словарь* [Russian biographical dictionary], Vol. 16 (St. Petersburg: Imperial Russian Historical Society Publishing, 1913), 146. [тяжко заболел и вынужден был уйти в отставку с чином генерал-лейтенанта и званием заслуженного профессора Академии].

²⁰⁷ ‘Miscellanea’, *Historical Herald*, 253. [тихое помешательство].

²⁰⁸ A few weeks before this happened, in May 1885, Sofia Grigorievna sent a letter to a pope, in which she asks for a prayer for the health of Stanislav Rekhnevskii and expresses her hope that praying to the ‘holy healer Panteleymon’ will cure her ‘enervated’ husband ‘as it cured an enervated in the times of King Maximilian’. ‘Рехневская-Мей, Софья Григорьевна’ [Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, Sofia Grigorievna], f. 257. 1861-1888. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House).

²⁰⁹ Polianskaia, ‘Biography of S.G. Rekhnevskaiia’, f. 257, d. 88. [Имея громадный запас энергии].

Her grief is growing with the progressing illness of her husband. First she gives the publication of her magazine to other hands, and before the very death of her husband, she transfers to the Committee [of the Ladies Circle] the management of the Shelter, which she for ten years provided with an unceasing care.²¹⁰

In 1881, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei indeed passed her publishing duties to Ekaterina Esaulova (probably her cousin, as the Esaulovys were the relatives of the Polianskiys). In 1883, she resigned from the editorship of *Modnyi magazin* as well: first in favor of Esaulova, who then passed it on to the nobleman Vasilii Turba.²¹¹ As described by *Russkaia starina*, 'In 1886, feeling old and sick, S. Gr. [Sofia Grigorievna] abandoned the management of the Shelter of St. Kseniia and left the Society'.²¹²

After the death of Rekhnevskii, Sofia Grigorievna received a letter from Paris sent by countess Lydiia Rostopchina, who, like her mother Evdokiia Rastophina,²¹³ had become a writer and eventually moved to Paris (well-known in Parisian literary circles as Countess Lydie Rostopchine, she often contributed to *Modnyi magazin* with her reviews of French social life). In 1886 she wrote to Rekhnevskaiia-Mei:

I found out [...] about the loss that befell you, Sofia Grigorievna [...] I do not know if it is better that your poor husband stopped suffering; you know it better, but you bury with him your past happiness and memories of the bright days. I am sorry for you. I remember well your love for him, all your care, your nursing; what will you do with your life now? [...] Do you still take care of our dear Shelter?²¹⁴ In I.M., the name of E.A.N. [Elizaveta Alekseevna Naryshkina] is often mentioned, but no one talks about you when it comes to a concert or a ball in favour of St. Kseniia [Shelter]. What does this mean?²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Ibid. [сначала она передает издание своего журнала в другие руки, а перед самой смертью своего мужа сдает и комитету дела по управлению Приютом, о котором она в продолжении десяти лет имела беспрестанное попечение]

²¹¹ In the same year, the journal was bought by Herman Goppe, Sofia Grigorievna's main competitor. He merged *Modnyi magazin* with one of his own fashion publications, *Modnyi svet* [Fashion World] (1866-1884).

²¹² Polianskaia, 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigor'ievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', *Russkaia starina*. [В 1886 чувствуя себя старой и больной, С.Гр. отказалась от управления Приютом Св. Ксении и вышла из общества].

²¹³ See Chapter 1.2.

²¹⁴ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei convinced Lydiia Rostopchina (who was an active philanthropist in Paris) to become a member, but in 1874 the latter had to resign because this Society 'was great but expensive' and, after her family wealth was suddenly gone, she could not afford paying 25 rubles as an annual membership fee. 'Письма Рехневской. Письма Ростопчиной Л.А.' [Rekhnevskaiia's letters. Letters from Rostopchina L.A.], f.257, d.48. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House).

²¹⁵ Rekhnevskaiia's letters. Letters from Rostopchina L.A., f.257, d.48, Institute of Russian Literature. [Я узнала [...] о постигшей вас потери, многоуважаемая София Григорьевна [...] Не знаю, лучше ли, что ваш бедный муж перестал страдать, вам лучше знать, но вы хороните с ним и свое прошлое счастье и воспоминание светлых дней. Жалко мне вас. Я хорошо помню вашу любовь к нему, все ваши заботы, уход, что вы теперь станете

What it meant is that it was exactly this personal drama which made Rekhnevskaiia-Mei 'feel old and sick' and forced her to abandon, one after the other, all her public duties. She died in 1889, three years after Stanislav Rekhnevskiy. According to *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 'never falling ill, she died almost suddenly, preserving until later years traces of youthfulness and attractiveness'.²¹⁶ She was buried in Aleksandro-Nevskaia Lavra, next to her second husband. As described by *Istoricheskii vestnik*,

at her funeral, there was not one of the writers, except for a male relative, who was managing the internment, and one old friend of [Lev] Mei. Meanwhile, for twenty years she was the editor and publisher of a journal, and in her house, while the poet was alive, gathered many writers.²¹⁷

The 'male relative' was Vladimir Ivanovich Golovin, a close friend of Lev Mei. In 1863, he married Elena Grigorievna Pol'ianskaia, one of Sofia Mei's younger sisters, to whom Sofia was particularly close. The author of the necrology in *Russkaia starina* notes that 'he [Golovin] had a sad lot burying him [Lev Mei], and almost thirty years later he was burying his sister-in-law, by lieutenant general's now widow, Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia'.²¹⁸ As the following chapter will show, Vladimir Golovin played a specific role not only in Sofia Mei's personal life, but in publishing *Modnyi magazin* as well.

1.4 'An exception among women': Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei as a peripheral intellectual

An overview of the fund related to Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, which is preserved in the Institute of Russian Literature in St. Petersburg, presents an accurate overview of her socio-cultural capital: materials related to *Modnyi magazin* which she published and edited are followed by materials related to the St. Kseniia's Shelter, of which she was the founder and manager. These are complemented with private correspondence, where one sees the names of the Grand Duchess Maria Fiodorovna, the court lady Elizavieta Naryshkina, the famous Russian feminist Maria Trubetskaiia, poet and translator Piotr Weinberg, nobleman Arkhipov, statesman and military

делать с вашей жизнью? [...] Занимаетесь ли вы все нашим дорогим приютом? В И.М. всегда упоминается имя Е.А.Н-й, а про вас не говорят, когда идет дело о концерте или балу в пользу Св. Ксении. Что это значит?].

²¹⁶ 'Miscellanea', *Historical Herald*, 253. [никогда не хвоя, умерла почти внезапно, до поздних лет сохранив следы молодости и привлекательности].

²¹⁷ Ibid. [на похоронах не было никого из писателей, кроме родственника, распоряжавшегося погребением, да одного старого товарища Мея. А между тем, она двадцать лет была редактором-издательницей журнала, и в ее доме, при жизни поэта, собиралось много литераторов].

²¹⁸ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [выпала грустная доля хоронить его, а почти через 30 лет ему же пришлось хоронить и свояченицу, тогда уже вдову Генерал-лейтенанта Софью Григорьевну Рехневскую, издательницу модно-литературного журнала «Модный магазин»].

officer Fiodor Triepov, lawyer and publicist Vladimir Spasovich, scientist Orest Khvol'son, the daughter of the famous countess Rastopchina, and others. Connected to all these people and domains through her private life and public occupations, Rekhnevskaja-Mei belonged to the peripheral Russian elite (in Shils', Zarycki's, and Hannerz' terms) in multiple respects simultaneously. While it might at first seem counterintuitive to classify a fashion magazine's editor as a representative of an intellectual elite, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei was surely the one. To proceed further with this assertion, it is important at this point to return to the working concept of 'peripheral intellectuals', presented in the introduction.

Edward Shils broadly defines intellectuals as 'sensitive, inquiring, curious, creative minds in the society' operating through 'such intellectual institutions as schools, churches, newspapers, and similar structures'.²¹⁹ Their belonging to this particular social class is related less to the domain of their work than to the social function which they fulfill for the rest of society: the provision of 'models and standards, the presentation of symbols to be appreciated'.²²⁰ When it comes to peripheral intellectuals, this mediating role (between the cultural field and the broader audience) acquires another layer: bridging the cultural fields of the periphery and the center (through gatekeeping, interpreting, reconciling, etc.). Situated at the leading edge of socio-cultural developments and particularly sensitive to them, local intellectuals are the first to notice the marginal and dependent status of society. They are also the ones who are the most concerned: in the cultural elite, this peripheral position inspires an uncomfortable sense of inferiority, which they seek to overcome (or negotiate). Thus, peripheral intellectuals are, first, sensitive enough to be aware of their own peripherality and, second, possess the necessary resources (symbolic capital) to articulate this to the broader public and suggest ways of overcoming it. Furthermore, this dissertation suggests applying this center-periphery framework and the concept of peripheral intellectuals to the peripherality of social groups within their own country or culture (in particular, to women's peripheral status vis-à-vis men in the nineteenth-century patriarchal society).

During all periods of her life, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei belonged to a doubly peripheral socio-cultural group: Russian women. Cultural peripherality as a Russian was determined by the culture's provincial status, according to which it was seen by both Europeans and Russians themselves as culturally dependent on the West. Social peripherality as a woman was determined by the patriarchal social structure, which relegated women to a disadvantaged position in almost all domains of life. Was Rekhnevskaja-Mei aware of this peripherality – her own and that of her

²¹⁹ Edward Shils, *The Intellectuals and The Powers and other essays* (Chicago (Ill.): University of Chicago press, 1972), 4.

²²⁰ Ibid, 5.

female compatriots? Did she have symbolic capital to reflect upon? Did she put it in practice by trying to negotiate it (suggesting ways of overcoming it)? In other words, can we call her a ‘peripheral intellectual’? The following paragraphs trace the complexity and variety of factors which contributed to Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s function as a representative of the intellectual, or cultural, elite. In this respect, three distinct periods of her life shaped the three stages of her role as a doubly-peripheral intellectual: incubation, accumulation, and application of her expertise.

1822-1850: Incubation

Firstly, well-born Sofia Polianskaia received the best education available for women: in the prestigious gymnasium, then with private tutors in the home of one of the most noble families of St. Petersburg, and later with teachers hired by her father specially for her. She was privileged to develop her natural, remarkable intellectual and artistic abilities, which were witnessed by her family members. Furthermore, her families’ social standing and connections afforded her first-hand access to the highest social circles and allowed her to grow up surrounded by members of the Imperial Court. This period of her life determined Sofia Grigorievna’s worldview and taste: ‘She maintained her love to the highest, aristocratic society and graceful surroundings throughout her entire life’,²²¹ her sister explains. Why is an aristocratic upbringing and education so crucial for classifying her as a peripheral Russian intellectual? In a comparative analysis of cultural and educational traditions among late 18th and 19th century European nobility, Dominic Lieven describes educated Russian aristocrats as ‘European Russians’. He emphasizes that the combination of powerful influences from German, French, and British cultural heritage and educational systems resulted in a profoundly cosmopolitan worldview of the Russian nobility of the late 18th and the 19th centuries:

By 1800, in Europe – but not quite of it –, he [a Russian aristocrat] was open to all the continent’s national cultures, many of which he could appreciate in their original languages. Europe was a cultural unity to him in a way that could never be true for an Englishman or a Prussian.²²²

Thus, the nobility’s education implied – or rather was centered around – socialization in the Western socio-cultural code. At the same time, the imperial Russian elite’s ‘greatest challenge was a cultural one’: to create ‘a new cultural type’ which would reconcile its multicultural identity as an ‘educated Russian European’ with the heart-felt need of ‘patriotic self-esteem’ necessary for

²²¹ Polianskaia, ‘To the biography of L.A. Mei’, 89. [Любовь к высшему, аристократическому обществу и изящной обстановке сохранились у нее на всю жизнь].

²²² Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815-1914* (Hamshire: Macmillan, 1992), 179.

any national elite ('the sensitivity of peripheral intellectuals', in Shils' terms). It was the task of aristocrats who, unlike the peasantry and merchant classes who stemmed from 'a different cultural world', possessed the necessary socio-cultural and economic capital to solve this profound cultural dilemma. Thus, growing up and receiving her education among the highest Russian aristocracy not only socialized Sofia Grigorievna in the Western code of conduct (which she would have received even on a provincial gentry estate), but introduced to her the specifically upper-class need to define and cherish its own Russian identity.

Lieven speaks about a Russian (and also French, English, or German) aristocrat as 'him'. But what about 'her'? Michelle Marrese argues that educated Russian noblewomen, with their 'unproblematic multiculturalism', directly participated in the process of Russifying European cultural norms. Marrese's gendered approach thus discusses the elite-women's agency in exercising a formative influence over cultural development and their role in adopting, adjusting, and (re-)shaping the socio-cultural norms. In other words, Marrese argues for including women in the ranks of peripheral intellectuals, or cultural elite, without marginalizing their historical role in this cross-cultural mediation (cultural adaptation). It is thus crucially important that Sofia Polianskaia spent her formative years being brought up together with the daughters of a prominent St. Petersburg elite woman, known, moreover, for her 'obsession with educating her children'. Her upbringing under Arkharova's and Vasilchikova's personal guidance set the initial direction for her perception of the socio-cultural function of a Russian woman, of which the national self-definition was a formative component.

Were Russian noblewomen aware of their marginal social position within their own society? According to Engel, in the context of an autocratic social and family structure, Russian women's resistance to patriarchy took subtle forms. This was partly the reason why the raising of the woman question in the 1850s-1860s was commonly interpreted as led by men and discussed without the participation of women themselves. However, the fertile ground for this 'sudden' explosion of emancipatory ideas had already been forming among elite women for decades; this was fuelled by improving education which, along with other inputs, gave women access to contemporary Western literature and philosophic thought. In this context, elite women, privileged to have an abundance of resources (wealth, time, education), were the first ones to question the unbearable lightness of their existence. Similarly, from an early age, Sofia Mei stood out among her female peers with her serious, focused attitude: she 'minded her own business', as Lev Mei noticed. Despite many admirers, she did not marry until she was almost thirty. Despite her love for the luxurious worldly lifestyle, she married someone who didn't have an elite heritage or prospects of wealth, but had cultural capital and an intellectual occupation. All this indicates an

early search for a meaningful life, which took place more than a decade before liberal thought placed the questions of women's education and productive occupations on the social agenda.

1850-1862: Accumulation

Secondly, her marriage to Mei brought Sofia to St. Petersburg, introduced her to the growing publishing industry, and allowed her to develop personal connections with the leading literati. Most importantly, however, it put her at the epicentre of socio-cultural and artistic debates in both Russian capitals during the most intellectually intense decade of Imperial Russian history. In this decade, debates between the Slavophiles and Westernizers constituted the main nerve of Russian intellectual debates on the future of the country and its desirable cultural path. This obliged all writers to take one side or another. In contrast, the absence of a distinct position was characteristic of Lev Mei's personality and creative legacy. In Moscow, the folkloristic character of Mei's poetry determined his position within the Slavophiles' camp, although not among its active defenders.²²³ In St. Petersburg he did not take a radical position and thus 'got along with many writers'.²²⁴ For example, despite his previous (relative) inclination towards official discourse, in St. Petersburg Mei became close friends with revolutionary democrats Mikhail Mikhailov and Nikolai Shelgunov (also early proponents of women's emancipation). His position had never been principled and categorical in since social problems were naturally not of particular interest to him. This relative indifference to the contemporary debates provoked major criticism from both contemporaries and generations that followed: free of controversy and social standpoints, his work was seen as detached from the topics which fired the imagination of his generation. Ironically, this allowed Sofia Grigorievna to further broaden her won horizon, as it was precisely this feature of Lev Mei that put him and his wife at crossroads between the conflicting perspectives regarding Russia's desirable socio-cultural development (first and foremost, in its cultural relations with the West). Although Lev Mei was not the brightest nor the most gifted among the many stars of this brilliant decade in Russian literary life, his close acquaintance with different representatives of the intellectual community allowed his wife to be in the very middle of contemporary debates on Russia's future, which set the tone for the rest of the imperial period.

Furthermore, apart from the Westernizers-vs.-Slavophiles dilemma, the liberalization of the public discourse of the 1850s-early 1860s allowed intellectuals to put other important topics on the agenda. As pointed out by Kseniia Buchmeyer, literary translation of foreign writers in the

²²³ Buchmeyer, *Мей Л. А. Стихотворения*.

²²⁴ Ibid. [Не занимая радикальных общественных позиций, М. находил общий язык с многими литераторами].

1850-1860s turned into a massive ‘enlightening’ trend related to the emergence of ‘a democratic reader, largely not proficient in foreign languages’.²²⁵ This was how Russian intellectuals performed their social function as a cultural elite. Sofia Mei’s fluency in French and English enabled her to put into practice her own education and skills. Following the example of her husband, she translated a few Western literary pieces, which were published in respectable literary journals. Both *Syn otiechestva* and *Bibliotieka dl’ia chtieniia* were among the leading Russian periodical publications of the period, so called ‘thick journals’ which focused on both Russian and European literature and published original pieces and translations of the most talented Russian literati. The fact that Sofia Grigorievna’s translations were published in the journals where her husband and many of his friends published their works highlights the way that the immediate surrounding of talented writers and translators played a role not only in establishing her literary connections but also in shaping her literary tastes and standards.

Although the first ‘hot topic’ of the Russian intellectual discourse of the period was the emancipation of serfs, it was very closely followed by the emancipation of women. Linda Edmondson calls this decade (till the late 1860s) ‘the most exciting and intellectually stimulating period in the history of the woman question in Russia’.²²⁶ Once again, being surrounded by intellectuals and writers from various camps provided Sofia Mei with first-hand access to the theoretical debates of the time and helped her shape her own standpoint. At the same time, her own private experience indirectly forced her to face the practical side of the woman question. Ten years of financial need not only motivated her to launch her own magazine. Even more importantly, this long period of extremely limited financial resources united her with those numerous Russian (gentry)women who experienced the same in the aftermath of the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Before launching a magazine, she was, apart from writing and translating, giving private lessons and selling her fine needlework, which allowed her to support her family. This decade broadened her practical experience, gave her an insider perspective on life beyond the wealthy nobility, and strengthened her convictions in the necessity and inevitability of (gentry) women’s work. In 1876, in a letter to her sister Anna (the author of the memoirs), she wrote: ‘to a certain extent, the best thing of all is freedom and independent work’.²²⁷

1862-1889: Application

²²⁵ Buchmeyer, ‘L.A.Meï’, P. 42. [демократического читателя, в своем большинстве не владеющего иностранными языками].

²²⁶ Linda Edmondson, Review of *Русский феминизм как вызов современности* [Russian feminism as a challenge of modernity], by Irina Iukina, *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 2, no. 3 (December 15, 2010): 229.

²²⁷ ‘Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, Sofia Grigorievna’, f. 257, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House). [В некоторой мере лучше всего свобода и самостоятельный труд]

Thirdly, her marriage to Stanivslav Rekhnevskii brought Sofia Grigorievna financial stability, comfort, and respectable social standing. Not only did this facilitate her access to the Parisian fashion scene (during their frequent stays there) but it also allowed her to engage in women's and pro-women's activism which, according to Stites, signified 'the beginning of feminism in Russia'.²²⁸ St. Kseniia's Shelter, aimed at supporting young female students and job-seekers, was a clear statement of her wish to facilitate an emergence in Russia of a class of women able to provide for themselves through respectable occupations. Her activity as a pro-woman philanthropist signified not only her personal devotion to women's emancipation but also her belonging to a narrow circle of early Russian feminists, with above-mentioned Anna Filosofova being its unofficial but generally (and internationally) acknowledged leader. Stites describes early Russian feminists as 'well educated members of the privileged classes, past their first youth when they began their work' and points to 'their preference for caution and their refusal to break completely with the past, their traditions, and their families, as the nihilists were to do'.²²⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's social profile and convictions (e.g. awareness of women's social peripherality) united her with them and became the basis for the personal ties and joint activities.

Furthermore, in their activities Russian feminists substantially relied on the experience and reasoning of their Western counterparts. Stites argues that the basic goals and techniques of early Russian feminism were inspired by those first developed in the West, particularly by the British feminists.²³⁰ Therefore, these Russian women, broadly understood in Shils' terms, could be seen as peripheral intellectuals existing simultaneously in two dimensions. On the one hand, as elite representatives of Russian womanhood, early feminists began to negotiate women's disadvantaged social status (in particular, by enabling their less fortunate female compatriots to gain access to education and reach financial independence). On the other hand, as peripheral Russian elite, they were adopting and adapting (gatekeeping and reconciling) the 'metropolitan' Western experience and ideas in order to address local Russian challenges. For twenty years, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei belonged to their most engaged ranks, and this leading-edge experience further contributed to her complex and unique expertise as a (doubly) peripheral intellectual, which she then passed on to her audience. Her sister summarized her life experience in the following way: 'A rare woman of that time could concentrate in her hands so much activity and such varied occupations. Therefore,

²²⁸ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 47.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 66.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 64-88.

one can say without exaggerating that she was one of the first Russian women who proved what women's work means'.²³¹

As this chapter has demonstrated, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's elite education and background, varied life experiences, and strong personality placed her at the forefront of the major socio-cultural debates and processes of her time. The combination of these diverse experiences, firstly, granted her a comprehensive awareness of the cultural and gender-based peripherality of her female Russian compatriots and, secondly, provided her with the socio-cultural capital to reflect on it and, where possible, negotiate it (and suggest ways of overcoming it). In the next chapter, I outline the links between the personality of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, on the one hand, and the format and self-positioning of *Modnyi magazin*, on the other, and trace how the mediating editorial habitus helped her shape a magazine with a unique format and agenda.

²³¹ Polianskaia, 'Biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 257, d. 88. [Редко кто из женщин того времени мог сосредоточивать в своих руках столько дела и такие разнообразные занятия. Потому без преувеличения можно сказать, что она одна из первых русских женщин, которая доказала, что значит женский труд].

Chapter 2: 'Journal of Fashion, Literature, and Social Life': *Modnyi magazin* and Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei as a mediating editor

In this chapter, I argue that it was the editor's individual capital, translated into her publishing approach and editorial program, that allowed her magazine to formatively contribute to the evolution of the Russian fashion as well as women's press. In her comparative study of four Russian women's press publishers in the 1880s, Carolyn Marks argues that Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's literary connections played the key role in the quick success of *Modnyi magazin*.²³² My research confirms the significance of the editor's immersion into the literary and publishing domain. The very creation of *Modnyi magazin* was enabled by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's marriage to Lev Mei and her belonging to his literary circle(s). The future editor acquired her initial literary experience by publishing her short stories and translations in the prestigious *Biblioteka dl'ia chteniia* and *Syn otiechestva*, developed the idea of launching a journal while surrounded by publishers and literati, and collected part of her starting capital through a loan from the Literary Foundation. Finally, according to *Russkaia starina*, *Modnyi magazin* owed its initial success to the fact that during the first ten years it was published in the famous St. Petersburg printing house of Vladimir Ivanovich Golovin, who 'played a big part in this publication'.²³³ A close friend of Lev Mei and a frequent visitor to Meis' literary salon, Golovin married Elena Grigorievna Polianskaia, Sofia's younger sister (with whom she was very close) in 1863. All these important factors definitely enabled Rekhnevskaiia-Mei to launch her magazine, and in this regard her story is representative of the history of the (emerging) Russian women's journalism of the period. In the chapter for the recent volume on Russian women's journalism in the Russian Empire, Jehanne Gheith points out to the decisive role which personal connections with the representatives of the literary world played in enabling the journalistic careers of the early Russian women editors.²³⁴ Evgeniia Konradi, Avdot'a Panaeva, Evgeniia Tur, Mariia Vernadskaiia were all able to enter into periodical publishing thank to their husbands and friends who belonged to the literary or publishing circles. At the same time, Gheith argues convincingly that their mediating skills in turn formatively contributed to the

²³² See Carolyn Marks, 'Providing Amusement for the Ladies: The Rise of the Russian Women's Magazine,' in *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia*, edited by Jeanne Gheith and Barbara Norton (Durham & London: Duke University press, 2001), 93-120.

²³³ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [После смерти мужа С. Г. Издавала ММ 20 лет, с большим успехом, в особенности первые 10 лет, когда журнал имел самостоятельный характер и печатался в типографии В.М. Головина, который принимал большое участие в этом издании].

²³⁴ See Jehanne Gheith, 'Redefining the perceptible: The Journalism(s) of Evgeniia Tur and Avdot'a Panaeva,' in *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. by Jeanne Gheith and Barbara Norton (Durham & LondondDuke university press, 2001), 53-74.

evolution of the Russian periodical press of the period. In this respect, too, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei is another prominent name to add to this short list.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei life path placed her at the intersection of several socio-cultural domains (high society, intellectual circle, early feminists), cultural fields (Russian and Western), and socio-economic groups (social strata). In this chapter, I examine how the complexity and variety of her personal experience allowed her to merge these diverse socio-cultural dispositions in shaping the idiosyncratic format, agenda, and self-positioning of *Modnyi magazin*. Before I proceed with a detailed analysis of the link between the editor's expertise and the content of *Modnyi magazin*, I need to return to Matthew Philpotts' concept of 'mediating editorial habitus', discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. To remind, with this notion Philpotts means the editor's individual capacity to not only occupy 'a dynamic position between the extremes of the field' but to successfully negotiate the complex 'nexus of social, economic, and artistic relations which find material form in a journal or magazine'.²³⁵ The ideal or 'mediating' editor, according to Philpotts, possesses 'a highly differentiated, multiple habitus encompassing intellectual, economic, and social dispositions which allow him to mediate the network of forces of which he is the focus'.²³⁶ While Philpotts uses 'him', referring to a male editor (of a literary journal), this insightful concept could be further elaborated if applied to a Russian woman editor of a fashion magazine. This presumably implies two additional levels of mediation: first, between the West (as the 'center of creativity', or the source of ideas and trends) and (semi)peripheral Russian readership and, second, between the general socio-cultural field and socially marginalized women's audience. In particular, I analyze how Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's social and cultural capital as a peripheral intellectual became the basis of her mediating editorial habitus and resulted in the formative role which her magazine played in the development of the Russian fashion as well as women's press. In addition to secondary sources (historical and modern), the primary material for this chapter includes those elements of the magazine that outline its program and shed light on the editorial policy: yearly subscription announcements, editorial addresses, and responses to readers, in which the editor clarified her standpoint.

²³⁵ Matthew Philpotts, 'The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus,' in *The Modern Humanities Language Review* 107, no. 1 (January 2012): 42.

²³⁶ Ibid, 43.

only available option. The magazine was published in the format of 1 ½ to 2 printed page and in the first year of publication did not contain many illustrations. Marks argues that its initial format resembled that of the thick literary journals more than an illustrated fashion magazin,²³⁸ although it was made on the expensive paper and beautifully decorated with vignettes. But in the mid-1860s it started to include increasingly more illustrative materials, related to fashion as well as illustrating the scenes from social life.

According to *Russkaia starina*, ‘*Modnyi magazin* was very popular and had a lot of subscribers’.²³⁹ The magazine immediately became commercially successful: a few years after its launch, it was distributed in 6000 copies, which was among the highest rates that the Russian fashion press had reached in the 1860s (for example, *Vaza* had ‘meagre 600 to 700 copies’²⁴⁰ and *Modnyi magazin*’s competitor *Novyi Russkii bazar* ([New Russian bazar], 1867-1917) had the same 6000)²⁴¹. As becomes evident from the responses to readers, *Modnyi magazin* had subscribers from different corners of the Russian Empire: readers sent their letters from Moscow, Kursk, Rostov-on-Don, Nizhniy Novgorod, Tver’, Kiev, Odessa, Zhytomir, Shatsk, Chernigov, Tsarskie kolodzy (today’s Georgia). Furthermore, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei mentioned that it was ‘shipped abroad: to Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and even to Algeria’.²⁴² As becomes clear from the striking difference in price between *Vaza* and *Modnyi magazin*, the latter targeted at the much broader audience than the preceding elitist press. I will return to the magazine’s targeting policy later in this section.

Modnyi magazin had a twofold structure and was comprised of the fashion and literary sections. The fashion section consisted of visual and textual elements: the visual component included imported colored fashion plates (one per issue), numerous black-and-white fashion patterns, and full-size cut-out fashion patters regularly attached as supplements. The textual part consisted of ‘a report on new fashion, descriptions of splendid outfits, explanation of attached fashion plates, patterns and needlework, with detailed indications on cutting, sewing, and finishing of garments’.²⁴³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei was the sole author and editor of all the fashion-related

²³⁸ Marks, ‘Provid[ing] Amusement’, 100.

²³⁹ ‘Материалы к биографии Софьи Григорьевны Рехневской-Мей’, f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [но кроме того, она много писала и переводила для литературного отдела, который был тоже очень хорош. «Модный магазин» был очень популярным и имел много подписчиков].

²⁴⁰ Marks, ‘Provid[ing] Amusement’, 102.

²⁴¹ Christine Ruane, *The Empire’s New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009), 99.

²⁴² Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Моды’ [Fashions], *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 390. [посылается за границу: в Германию, Швейцарию, Италию, Грецию и даже Алжирию].

²⁴³ Subscription announcement for 1868, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867. [Модный отдел будет заключать в себе: отчет о новых модах, описание замечательных туалетов, объяснение прилагаемых рисунков, выкроек и работ, с подробным указанием кройки, шитья и отделки нарядов].

materials. The literary section of *Modnyi magazin* included original Russian and translated literary pieces, thematic features (articles), and regular reviews of social life in Russia and abroad, written by the editor herself as well as the magazine's multiple contributors. However, the division between the two sections was fluid and varied from year to year. During the first years, the magazine was published two times per month with every issue containing both the fashion-related and literary, journalistic, and entertaining textual materials (short anecdotes, proverbs etc.). In the late 1860s, probably due to the growing number of illustrations, *Modnyi magazin* was divided into two separate bi-monthly issues: thus, two fashion and two literary issues per month were sent to the readers alternately. The editor called the magazine's issues 'books' [книжки], which suggested readers to bound them in the end of the year and preserve as a book. The fashion section sometimes was called 'technical' and included only the illustrative material and description of patterns, while Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fashion editorials (fashion *feuilletons* [фельетоны]) were incorporated into literary issues, although this happened rarely. For the sake of clarity, throughout the dissertation the term 'fashion section' will refer to all the fashion-related material published in an issue, both illustrative and textual, regardless of which 'book' ('technical' or 'literary') it was placed in that particular month or year. Accordingly, 'literary section' includes all other materials apart from fashion column, description of patterns, and fashion illustrations.

In the comprehensive source on the pre-revolutionary periodical press *Bibliografiia russkoi periodicheskoi pechati, 1703-1900* [Bibliography of the Russian Periodical Press, 1703-1900] by Nikolai Lisovskii, *Modnyi magazin* is mentioned with a subtitle 'Fashion, Literature, News, Housekeeping and Women's Works'.²⁴⁴ This subtitle is the initial one used by the publisher in 1863-1866. However, between 1866 and 1883, *Modnyi magazine* was published under at least nine different subtitles, varying from the 'First Illustrated Fashion Magazine' (where 'the first', most probably, means 'the best') to the 'Generally Useful Family Journal'. In the context of the growing competition on the fashion press market, this somewhat chaotic changing of subtitles throughout the 1870s seems to reflect the editor's attempts to meet the expectations of the readership. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the most suitable and accurate of all was the subtitle 'Illustrated Journal of Fashion, Literature, and Social Life', which highlights the journal's core components and summarizes its agenda.

As follows from the annual outlines of the magazine's program, the content of the literary section consisted of a few core components, which were supplemented by various occasional

²⁴⁴ Nikolai Lisovskii, *Библиография русской периодической печати, 1700-1900 гг.* [Bibliography of the Russian periodical press, 1700-1900]. Moscow: Literary review, 1995. <http://feb-web.ru/feb/periodic/lb-abc/1.htm>. [Моды, литература, новости, хозяйство и работы].

articles. Thus, every issue invariably included original and translated literary and journalistic pieces (mostly short stories and critical articles, as well as thematic features on varied topics). An indispensable column was the social life review (social feuilleton) which informed ‘on various news and events, which occupy modern society the most’.²⁴⁵ Depending on who was its author, the format of this column changed over time, with St. Petersburg and foreign social life news being presented separately or together. In 1865, the main feuilleton (focused mostly on St. Petersburg and Moscow) was complemented by a separate one on social life abroad. Since 1866, the two were combined within the *News of Russian and Foreign Life* [Новости русской и заграничной жизни]. In the late 1870s, this column was called *Mosaic* [Мозаика] and, instead of a coherent text, consisted of separate news presented in bullet points. The news on art, music, and theatre, as well as scientific innovations, was regularly covered in such reviews as part of social life, although occasionally they were also presented separately. Apart from that, the literary section frequently included biographical and historical notes (commonly related to women), as well as travel notes written from different countries by the magazine’s contributors. In the 1870s, subscription announcements and overviews of the program started to include reviews of ‘women’s activity’, which was covered in as part of social life column as well as in a separate column and thematic features (e.g. on women’s education, work or organized charity in Russia and abroad). Sometimes the magazine’s disclaimer added to the summary of the literary section household articles, kitchen, pedagogy, hygiene. Advice pieces on housekeeping and cooking recipes were included in the magazine, although they were usually short and placed on the very last page. In general, the magazine’s content was more focused on social life than on domestic concerns. A laconic disclaimer of 1874 neatly outlines the components of *Modnyi magazin*, while also placing them in the representative order of significance: ‘Fashion. – Literature. – News. – Charity. – Housekeeping’.²⁴⁶

‘A journal of good society’

In the subscription announcement for the twentieth publishing year, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei argued: ‘*Modnyi magazin* will be published by the same editorial board and with the same grace, decency and practicality, which distinguish this journal from all its imitators and won it a reputation of the ‘journal of good society’ [«журнала хорошего общества»].²⁴⁷ An overall

²⁴⁵ Subscription announcement for 1863, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, no. 23. [Фельетон будет продолжать сообщать всякие новости и происшествия, наиболее занимающие современное общество].

²⁴⁶ *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, no. 20. [Моды. – Литература. – Новости. – Благотворительность. – Хозяйство].

²⁴⁷ Subscription announcement for 1881, *Modnyi magazin*, 1880, no. 20. [«Модный магазин» будет издаваться под тою же редакцией и с тем же изяществом, порядочностью и практичностью, которые отличают этот журнал от всех его подражателей и заслужили ему репутацию «журнала хорошего общества»].

adherence to high quality, good taste, and ‘decency’ [порядочность] singularized *Modnyi magazin* among other magazines. For two decades *Modnyi magazin* managed to keep its respectable position on the increasingly competitive fashion press market, despite the pressure from the cheaper publications whose publishers possessed much more solid financial and technical resources than Rekhnevskaja-Mei ever did. The way the journal was perceived within the intellectual and publishing circles is reflected in an assessment by the important historical and literary monthly *Istoricheskii vestnik*. It interpreted the decreasing popularity of *Modnyi magazin* in the late 1870s in the following way: ‘the journal, despite the full conscientiousness of the editor, started to decline since the literature was invaded by *zhidovskie* [jewish, жидовские] publications with their cheap illustrations’.²⁴⁸ This refers to the popular magazines based on templates from German fashion publications: *Novyi Russkii bazar* and *Modnyi svet* ([Fashion World], 1868-1917) and which relied on *Der Bazar* (1855-1937) and *Die Modenwelt* (1868-1903) respectively. What is interesting here is that *Modnyi magazin*, despite being a fashion journal, was regarded as belonging to ‘literature’, or the literary press, with its broadly acknowledged socio-cultural prestige and authority. In contrast, the translated German press was presented as cheaper commercial enterprises of inferior quality. These magazines were, indeed, the main competitors of *Modnyi magazin*. In 1883, soon after Rekhnevskaja-Mei resigned from her editorial duties, the magazine was merged with *Modnyi svet*. Its new publisher Herman Goppe has not merely absorbed the old magazine into his own one but included its competitors’ name into the new title *Modnyi svet i Modnyi magazin* [Модный свет и модный магазин]. This proves that *Modnyi magazin* till its last days maintained its socio-cultural value and kept its loyal audience.

Entering the fourteenth year of publication, Rekhnevskaja-Mei dedicated a separate editorial note to discussing the results of ‘her editorial and publishing activity’ in the previous years:

From its very emergence, *Modnyi magazin* attracted a general following, which allowed the editorial board to broaden its program and bring the publication to that brilliant position, which it currently occupies. [...] The success of *Modnyi magazin* provoked tremendous competition: there emerged numerous fashion magazines that were tailored after the template of our publication and tried, where possible, to keep pace with it. [...] In the literary section, too, *Modnyi magazin* sets the tone and direction for other, congeneric

²⁴⁸ ‘Miscellanea’, *Historical herald* 36, 253. [журнал, не смотря на полную добросовестность редактора, начал падать с тех пор как в литературу вторглись жидовские издания с их дешевыми рисунками].

publications. Such an evident and undeniable acknowledgement of our authority utterly flatters us and imposes upon us a duty to not stop on our path of improvement.²⁴⁹

I argue that it was the editor's individual symbolic capital, translated into her publishing approach and editorial program, that allowed her magazine to not only stay afloat but also formatively contribute to the evolution of the Russian fashion as well as women's press. According to *Russkaia starina*, 'In the choice of patterns and composition of a fashion editorial, which she always wrote herself, one could guess the best taste of an educated woman of the good circle [хорошего крѳа]'.²⁵⁰ The same good taste marked the literary section of her magazine which, according to Marks, allowed *Modnyi magazin* to establish 'its niche among educated women'.²⁵¹ Anna Polianskaia also claims that *Modnyi magazin* stood out on the publishing market thanks to its remarkable quality:

The magazine started brilliantly, even the famous writers published their articles in it, she [Rekhnevskaiia-Mei] herself wrote the fashion review (*feuilleton*) and translated short stories from French and English; moreover, [she] composed large fashion patterns and herself was a [female] editor and publisher of the journal. All the vignettes, polytypes and illustrations in short stories were made by Russian artists, Professor Charlemagne, among others.²⁵² The journal was published on the excellent vellum paper, printed in the best printing house of V.I. Golovin and published four times per month. Someone said about this magazine: 'Nothing is more graceful and lovely than *Magazin* of Sofia Mei' [Нет изящней и милей «Магазина» Софьи Мей].²⁵³

²⁴⁹ 'From the Editorial Board', *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, no. 23. [С самого своего появления, Модный магазин обратил на себя общее внимание, что дало возможность редакции расширить свою программу и довести издание до того блистательного положения, в котором оно теперь находится. ... Успех Модного магазина вызвал громадную конкуренцию: - появилось множество модных журналов, которые выкраиваются по образцу нашего издания и, по возможности, стараются не отставать от него. ... В литературном отделе, точно также, Модный магазин дает тон и направление другим, однородным изданиям. Такое очевидное и несомненное признание нашего авторитета чрезвычайно льстит нам и налагает на нас обязанность не останавливаться на пути усовершенствований].

²⁵⁰ 'Miscellanea', *Historical herald*, 1889, 253. [Вообще в выборе выкроек и узоров и составлении модного фельетона, который она писала всегда сама, виден был лучший вкус образованной женщины хорошего круга].

²⁵¹ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 100.

²⁵² Adolf Iosifovich Charlemagne (1826-1901) was a famous St. Petersburg painter, his works were frequently exhibited abroad (in Paris, Vienna, Antwerp). The St. Petersburg audience knew him particularly for his works in the periodical press. See 'Шарлемань, Адольф Йосифович' [Charlemagne, Adol'f Iosifovich]. *Русский энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона* [Brokhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary], edited by Konstantin Arseniev and Fedor Petrushevskii, 178. St. Petersburg, 1903. https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/ЭСБЕ/Шарлемань,_Адольф_Йосифович.

²⁵³ Polianskaia, 'Biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 257, d. 88. [Журнал пошел отлично, даже известные литераторы помещали у ней небольшие статьи свои, сама же она писала модный фельетон и переводила повести с французского и английского; кроме того, составляла большие вырезные выкройки и сама была редактором-издательницей своего журнала. Все виньетки, полиטיפажи и иллюстрации ко повестям исполнялись русскими художниками, профессор Шарлемань. Журнал издавался на прекрасной веленовой

This quote sheds light on the multifaceted nature of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's editorial and publishing approach, which consisted in merging aesthetic pleasure with quality content: visual and textual materials, local and foreign sources and perspectives, Mei's individual standpoint and contributions of the magazine's multiples authors. In the following sections, I argue that Mei's mediating editorial habitus not only enabled the viability of *Modnyi magazin* but, most importantly, determined its socio-cultural significance with regard to the development of both the fashion and the women's press in the Russian Empire. By consecutively discussing *Modnyi magazin*'s fashion and literary sections, I bring up the variety of forms of Mei's mediation and situate this magazine in the history of the Russian periodical press.

2.2 *Modnyi magazin* as a fashion magazine

Despite its double fashion-and-literary structure, *Modnyi magazin* was, above all, a fashion publication. This is reflected in the very choice of the name, which Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei explained in her answer to a reader:

We could have called it [the magazine] after any flower or insect or anything else, but called it *Modnyi magazin* [Fashion Store] in order to give an idea that in our books we inform on different fashion news and attach fashion plates, patterns and other things which are in fashion.²⁵⁴

As Rekhnevskaiia-Mei was the sole author and editor of the entire fashion section, its content and quality thus fully depended upon her individual expertise. In general, the editor positioned her magazine as a medium of the metropolitan Parisian fashion for her Russian readers living in St. Petersburg as well as in the provinces. As Marianne Van Remoortel explains, adapting foreign content to domestic context required from early fashion editors a whole set of professional skills such as 'advanced language proficiencies, keen insight into the demands of the women's magazine market at home, and cultural affinity with the fashion press abroad'.²⁵⁵ The fashion section as shaped by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei not only clearly mirrored her mastery of these skills but also reveals the formative impact of her personal life experience on the editorial program of this section.

бумаге, печатался в лучшей печатной В.И.Головина и выходил 4 раза в месяц. Про этот журнал кто-то сказал: «Нет изящней и милей «Магазина» Софьи Мей»].

²⁵⁴ Responses of the editorial board, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, no. 1. [Мы могли бы назвать его каким-нибудь цветком или насекомым, или чем-угодно, но назвали «Модным магазином» для того, чтобы дать понятие, что в наших книжках сообщаются всякие модные новости и прилагаются модные картинки, выкройки, узоры и пр., что в моде].

²⁵⁵ Marianne Van Remoortel, 'Women Editors and the Rise of the Illustrated Fashion Press in the Nineteenth Century', in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 39, no. 4 (2017): 270.

In her monograph *The Emperor's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry (1700-1917)*, Christine Ruane dedicates a chapter to tracing the evolution of the pre-revolutionary Russian fashion press. In this historical overview, she suggests a periodization of its development as consisting of two stages:²⁵⁶ between 1830-1870 and 1870-1917. According to Ruane, the two generations differed along the two major lines: affiliation with the European fashion press market and their targeting policies. The first period (1830-1870) was characterized by the appearance of the first national publications created locally in St. Petersburg and targeted specially at the narrow elite circle, worldly and wealthy, which covered both the St. Petersburg and the Parisian fashion scenes and high societies. The most important among these magazines were *Vaza*, *Girlianda* ([Guirlande], 1846-1860), *Moda* ([Fashion], 1850-1861), *Modnyi magazin*. In contrast, the magazines of the second period (1870-1917) were marked by the broadening of the target audience beyond the wealthy nobility: 'new fashion journals expanded the market for fashion not by focusing exclusively on women of the elite but by including information and readers' services of interest to women of many social groups'.²⁵⁷ In addition, these magazines 'dropped any coverage of Russian fashion news and reported only on what was à la mode in Paris'.²⁵⁸ As the typical cases of this stage, Ruane mentions *Modnyi svet*, *Novyi Russkii bazar*, and *Modnyi vestnik* ([Fashion Herald], 1886-1917). It is important to clarify that the first two magazines were the translated versions of the popular German publications, while the third one positioned itself as a specifically Russian fashion magazine, just as the magazines of the first generation. In this respect, Ruane's periodization is not entirely coherent. Nevertheless, it insightfully points out to the invisible watershed which divided the small, locally-focused, elitist fashion magazines of – roughly – the first half of the century from the popular and more cosmopolitan press of the second. Therefore, I am going to build upon this periodization.

Although Ruane classifies *Modnyi magazin* as a typical case of the first generation of the Russian fashion magazines, I argue that this magazine belonged simultaneously to both stages and served as a bridge between them. To begin with, its very publishing period (1862-1883) overlapped in time with both generations and, as I have already mentioned, in 1883 it was merged with its main competitor *Modnyi svet*. After the rebranding of the magazine into *Modnyi svet i Modnyi*

²⁵⁶ The first proto-fashion magazine was launched in Russia in 1789. However, due to the small female readership, until 1830 none of the early publications managed to become commercially viable and to surpass the limit of one or two publishing years.

²⁵⁷ Christine Ruane, 'The Development of a Russian Fashion Press in Late Imperial Russia: *Moda: Zhurnal dlia svetskikh liudei*,' in *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. by Jeanne Gheith and Barbara Norton (Durham & London: Duke university press, 2001), 89.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 75.

magazin, Mei's journal continued its existence until the last days of the Russia Empire. Nevertheless, the most important is that Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei built the self-positioning of her magazine on two major marketing strategies: claiming *Modnyi magazin* an exclusive local source of Parisian fashion and broadening its targeting policy beyond the wealthy nobility. Her publishing approach thus signified the transition of the Russian fashion press along both major lines indicated by Ruane: from the local to the European and from the elitist to the popular. In this respect, *Modnyi magazin* can be seen as a missing link between the two generations of the Russian fashion press as it both embodied and fostered its evolution. In the following sections, I examine each aspect in detail and focus on the role of Rekhnevskaja-Mei's mediating habitus in the shaping of her editorial program.

Business links with the Parisian fashion press

In the subscription announcement for the sixteenth publishing year, editor summarized the reasons of her magazine's popularity: 'The specialty [особенность] of *Modnyi magazin* constitute: great fashion patterns, splendid Parisian gravures, numerous illustrations and supplements, fashion news (according to genuine sources), amusing and useful literature, competence of the editorial board and fifteen-year long success of the publication'.²⁵⁹ As becomes evident from this quote, high-quality illustrative material occupied the central place in the magazine's self-positioning as the leading fashion magazine in Russia. Since the very first issue and throughout the twenty years of its existence, the provision of Parisian fashion illustrations was indeed the specialty of *Modnyi magazin*. The majority of its fashion-related visual material was taken from the leading Parisian publications, known to be the world's primary source of fashion news and illustrations. In the announcement for the second publishing year, the editor states: 'to each issue will be attached a marvellous fashion gravure in the size of the publication itself; these gravures will be delivered from Paris immediately after their production, with a high speed train (*train de grande vitesse*)'.²⁶⁰ Almost two decades later, she reaffirms her program:

²⁵⁹ Subscription announcement for 1876, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 351. [Особенность «Модного магазина» составляют: превосходные выкройки, великолепные парижские гравюры, громадное число рисунков и приложений, известия о модах (по настоящим источникам), занимательная и полезная литература, компетентность редакции и пятнадцатилетний успех издания].

²⁶⁰ Subscription announcement for 1863, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, no. 2. [к каждому номеру будет приложена великолепная гравюра мод в величину самого издания; гравюры эти будут доставляться из Парижа тотчас по их выходе, по легкой почте (*train de grande vitesse*)].

In 1880, *Modnyi magazin* will be published by the same editorial board, as in the preceding years, with the participation of the best foreign artists and in agreement with the first Parisian houses, which deliver to us their fashion models and patterns.²⁶¹

Particularly significant was the scope and variety of business contracts which Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei established with foreign publishers: she included in her magazines the material taken from different French sources, acquired the exclusive rights on publishing them in the Russian Empire, and was modifying and diversifying these contracts throughout the years. This sheds light on *Modnyi magazin*'s role in establishing the Russian fashion press market as part of the international pan-European network.

Fashion illustrations published in *Modnyi magazin* were of two main types: coloured fashion plates and black-and-white in-text gravures. In addition, the magazine provided a wide range of paper patterns and clichés as supplements. In the first publishing year, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei included 12 coloured fashion plates and added several steel gravures. Thanks to the magazine's immediate success, in the following year she doubled the number of fashion plates. Furthermore, instead of the initial steel gravures which were added as supplements, the magazine now included more than a hundred in-text wooden gravures (polytypes). These illustrations were taken from the new French magazine *La Mode illustrée* (1860-1913) targeted at the middle-class women. This magazine was the first among the French magazines that appropriated the revolutionary wood-cut technique from the Berlin-based *Der Bazar*, which allowed for merging the text and the image on the page, as well as for cheaper and quicker reprinting of illustrations.²⁶² Quickly becoming 'phenomenally popular', *La Mode illustrée* fostered the spread of this technique across Europe by becoming the source of illustrations for foreign magazines, including the British *Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine* and Russian *Modnyi magazin*. The coloured fashion plates published in *Modnyi magazin* were signed by Anais Toudouze and Heloise Leloir, the famous women illustrators and sisters who worked particularly for *La Mode illustrée*. At the same time, since the very first year, *Modnyi magazin* also published the colored fashion plates signed by the celebrated Parisian illustrator Jules David. They were reprinted from the upmarket Parisian magazine *Le Moniteur de la mode* (1843-1914). Interestingly enough, while the works by Jules David were frequently emphasized in the subscription announcements, the illustrations taken from *La Mode illustrée* were presented simply as 'Parisian'.

²⁶¹ Subscription announcement for 1880, *Modnyi magazin*, 1879, no. 22. [В 1880 году Модный магазин будет издаваться под тою же редакцией, как и в прежние годы, при участие лучших заграничных художников и соглашениях с первыми парижскими домами, доставляющими нам свои модели и выкройки].

²⁶² For details see Van Remoortel, 'Women Editors'.

The exact source of them was not explicitly mentioned until 1866. Then, Rekhnevskiaia-Mei announced that in the following year she would publish

fashion gravures made by Compté Calix from *Les Modes parisiennes*, which have recently reached great perfection and outperformed all creations of this kind, particularly the gravures from *La Mode illustrée*, which we were giving to our subscribers for three years but which we have left because they had recently become extremely unsatisfactory.²⁶³

Compté Calix was another fashionable Parisian illustrator working for the upmarket French magazine *Les Modes parisiennes* (1843-1896). While adding its coloured fashion plates to each of its issues, *Modnyi magazin* continued to publish the ‘marvellous’ [великолепные] black-and-white engravings by Jules David from *Le Moniteur de la mode*. In comparison to the prestigious and luxurious *Le Moniteur de la mode* and *Les Modes parisiennes* that existed on the French fashion press market since 1843, the new *La Mode illustrée*, despite its widespread influence, had a much more humble self-positioning, with its emphasis on the middle-class women and economical approach to fashion. Apart from the quality of its illustrations (which, according to the editor, ‘did not satisfy [her] requirements, in the choice of styles as well as in their external decoration’)²⁶⁴, the distinctly middle-class connotations of this publication could be an additional reason why Rekhnevskiaia-Mei has never announced her affiliation with this popular magazine. In contrast, the affiliation with the ‘first Parisian’ magazines allowed Mei to repetitively claim her magazine ‘the best Russian publication’. Thus, in 1873, Sofia Rekhnevskiaia-Mei responded to a reader:

You are quite right: *Modnyi magazin* is not only one of the best but definitively the best of all the [Russian] fashion magazines – and this could be easily proven. It includes the two most famous Parisian publications: *Le Moniteur de la mode* and *Les Modes parisiennes*. The first sends us its black-and-white gravures, the second – its coloured ones. The clichés of women’s works we receive from *Le Moniteur des dames*, which is famous for its specialization. All these illustrations constitute the propriety of the editorial office of *Modnyi magazin* and no one in Russia has the right to reprint them without being held accountable to the law.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ ‘From the editorial board’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 375, no. 23. [модные гравюры Конт Каликса из *Les Modes parisiennes*, которые недавно достигли большого совершенства и превзошли все подобные работы такого типа, в частности гравюры из *La Mode illustrée*, которые мы давали своим подписчикам в течение трех лет но которые недавно оставили, так как они сделались в последнее время крайне неудовлетворительными].

²⁶⁴ Sofia Rekhnevskiaia-Mei, ‘Моды’ [Fashions], *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 363. [не вполне удовлетворяли нашим требованиям, как по выбору мод, так и по внешней их отделке]

²⁶⁵ ‘Responses of the editorial board’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 24, no. 1. [«Модный магазин» не только один из лучших но положительно лучший из всех модных журналов – и это легко доказать. В его состав входят два лучшие парижские издания: *Le Moniteur de la mode* и *Les Modes parisiennes*. Первый отправляет нам свои черно-белые гравюры, второй – цветные. Клише работ мы получаем из *Le Moniteur des dames*б славящегося

This quote makes explicit that the contracts between *Modnyi magazin* and French magazines were direct and official. Furthermore, Rekhnevskaja-Mei had exclusive rights on all the illustrations which she published in her magazine, which meant that none of them could be published in any other Russian magazine. I will return to this question.

During the Franco-Prussian war, when the train connection with Paris was interrupted, the fashion plates were sent to *Modnyi magazin* from the Brussels-based Belgian magazine *Le Journal des dames et demoiselles* (1841-1902), a sister publication of the Parisian *Le Moniteur des dames et des demoiselles* (1854-1902). In the 1876, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei announced that ‘All the gravures of *Modnyi magazin* – both coloured and polytypes – will be made by the best Parisian artists and printed in Paris’.²⁶⁶ This announcement signified the contract which the editorial office of *Modnyi magazin* established with *La Revue de la mode* (1872-1913), the successful French magazine established by Adolphe Goubaud, the publisher of *Le Moniteur de la mode*. As Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei explained in a response to a reader, ‘the editorial board has established the contact with the best Parisian fashion magazine *Revue de la Mode* which obliged itself to send us its illustrations, prepared and printed in Paris’.²⁶⁷ Consequently, in the following years *Modnyi magazin* published its fashion plates and gravures, with many of them being made by Gustav Janet, yet another prominent Parisian fashion illustrator. According to Mei, the editorial office of *Modnyi magazin* acquired ‘the exclusive right on these illustrations [in Russia]’.²⁶⁸ The relations with *La Revue de la mode* were emphasized by Mei particularly proudly, stressing that this magazine was the best in Paris and had a hundred thousand subscribers. Similarly to *Le Moniteur de la mode*, this magazine had a wide international network, for example, it provided illustrations for one of the most celebrated upmarket British magazines *The Queen*.²⁶⁹ In addition to these illustrations, in 1879-1883 some of the coloured fashion plates of *Modnyi magazin* were also reprinted from *Le Coquet* (1867-1910), a specialized French magazine for professional dressmakers, and *La Saison* (1867-1902), the French edition of the popular German magazine *Die Modenwelt* (1868-1903), and its satellite *Les Modes de la saison* (1867-1885). Throughout all these years, the number of black-and-white in-text gravures in *Modnyi magazin* was progressively growing: from only 100 in 1863 to 2000 in 1874.

своей специальностью Все эти иллюстрации составляют собственность редакции «Модного магазина» и никто в России не имеет права перепечатывать их, не подвергаясь ответственности перед законом].

²⁶⁶ Subscription announcement for 1876, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 304. [Все гравюры «Модного магазина» - как цветные так и полиграфические – будут создаваться лучшими парижскими художниками и печататься в Париже].

²⁶⁷ ‘Responses to readers’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1877, 72. [Редакция вошла в сношение с лучшим парижским журналом *La Revue de la Mode*, который обязался высылать нам свои иллюстрации, уже готовыми и отпечатанными в Париже].

²⁶⁸ Ibid. [исключительное право собственности на эти иллюстрации].

²⁶⁹ See Raymond Gaudriault, *La Gravure de Mode Feminine en France*, Paris: Editions des Amateurs, 1983.

The scope of the magazines from which Rekhnevskaiia-Mei reprinted the illustrative material is impressive. It demonstrates that under her editorship *Modnyi magazin* actively partook in the quickly developing European fashion press network, which in the second half of the century ‘began operating on the international playing field’²⁷⁰ with fashion illustrations – and fashion discourses – intensely circulating across the national borders. Although some of the earlier Russian fashion magazines also included French fashion plates, none of them established such a wide and diverse network of official and exclusive business relations with the major European publications as Rekhnevskaiia-Mei. As became clear from Mei’s own remarks and evidenced by *Biographicheskii slovar*, the exclusive nature of the contracts between the editorial board of *Modnyi magazin* and French publishers implied that no one else was legally allowed to reprint these materials in Russia. To my knowledge, the Russian archives did not preserve any correspondence or legal documents related to the contracts between the editorial office of *Modnyi magazin* and its Parisian counterparts. In 1862, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei pointed out that she subscribed these illustrations from Paris through her broker Ia. A. Isakov who orders, in the beginning of the year, from one of the main Parisian magazines for a certain number of plates.²⁷¹ While printing these plates for itself, this magazine also prints it for us, right there, without taking them off the machine, therefore the plates appear [in *Modnyi magazin*] and in Paris almost at the same time’.²⁷² However, Polianskaia argued that her sister regularly travelled to Paris for ‘the magazine’s business’ [по делам журнала]. In her second marriage, Sofia Grigorievna spent several months per year abroad, ‘first of all, in Paris, from where she brought the most recent fashion styles for an upcoming season and published them in her magazine’.²⁷³ This sheds light on the probability of direct contacts between Rekhnevskaiia-Mei and French publishers. For example, Best argues that the publisher of the British *Englishwomen’s Domestic Magazine* Samuel Beeton travelled to Paris to establish the business connection with the publisher of *Le Moniteur de la mode*. Similarly, in the first years of the her second marriage Mei started going to Paris, and it was then that she acquired exclusive rights on reprinting the illustrations from Goubaud’s publication.

²⁷⁰ Roxane Looft, ‘Unseen Political Spaces: Gender and Nationhood in the Berlin and Paris Fashion Press during the Franco-Prussian War’, in *Journal of European Periodical Studies* 2. no. 2 (2017): 47

²⁷¹ Iakov Alekseiievich Isakov (1811-1881) was a well-known St. Petersburg bookseller and publisher who traded foreign books and journals (French in particular) at comparatively low prices. See Tatiana Kupriianova, ‘Яков Алексеевич Исаков’ [Iakov Alekseiievich Isakov]. In *История предпринимательства в книжном деле России: Учебное пособие* [The History of Entrepreneurship in the Book Industry of Russia: Textbook]. Moscow: Moscow State University of Printing Arts, 2007. <http://www.hi-edu.ru/e-books/xbook704/01/about.htm>.

²⁷² ‘Responses of the editorial board’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 280. [комиссионера Я.А.Исакова, который, делает, в начале года, заказ одному из главных парижских журналов, на известное число картинок. Печатая картинки для себя, журнал этот печатает их и для нас, тут же, не снимая со станка так что картинки появляются у нас и в Париже почти в одно время].

²⁷³ ‘Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’, f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [прежде всего в Париже, откуда С.Гр. привозила самые свежие моды для наступающего сезона и помещала их в своем журнале].

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²⁷⁵ Subscription for 1868, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, no. 23. [рисунки наиболее интересных явлений русской современной жизни]

Conflict between Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei and Herman Goppe

Most importantly, there is an evidence of the ongoing direct correspondence between *Modnyi magazin*'s editor and an attorney of the publisher of *Revue de la mode*. The major evidence of Rekhnevskaja-Mei's direct contacts with the Parisian publishing business was a legal conflict on the unauthorized reuse of fashion gravures from *Le Revue de la mode* which arose in 1879 between her and the publisher of *Modnyi svet* Herman Goppe. The conflict consisted in the fact that in 1877-1878 Goppe published in *Modnyi svet* multiple black-and-white wood gravures from *Revue de la mode*, which had previously occurred in *Modnyi magazin* and of which Rekhnevskaja-Mei was the only legal owner in Russia. As a result, in 1878 she filed a complaint with the Petersburg Circuit court against Goppe. However, despite all the signs of counterfeiting, the court acquitted Goppe by claiming that the engraving were not artistic property but a mere technical skill. Rekhnevskaja-Mei used her magazine as a platform for raising and discussing this issue. In 1879, a week after the court session, she published a long and detailed note which included excerpts from the St. Petersburg judicial chronicle as well as her own comments. As explained in the excerpt from the chronicle, 'Sofia Rekhnevskaja (Mei) has exclusive property rights of the engravings of the French magazine *Revue de la mode* based on the letter from the editorial office of this magazine from the 18 of April 1877 and the Convention between Russia and France on the literary and artistic property signed on the 25 of March 1861'.²⁷⁶ The editor herself added that '[t]he two-year-long correspondence between editorial offices of *Revue de la mode* and *Modnyi magazin* clearly demonstrate[ed] [their] professional relations' and argued that the French publisher 'wanted to recognise my exclusive property rights of all the fashion plates that he was publishing in my magazine and in one of his letters asked me 'to protect our common rights from counterfeiters'.²⁷⁷ Particularly interesting is that Goppe reprinted the original illustrations of *Revue de la mode* not from the French magazine but from its Spanish edition. According to Rekhnevskaja-Mei, he did so because there was no convention on literary property between Russia and Spain.

In contrast to gentry-woman Rekhnevskaja-Mei who established the official partnership, Goppe was a tradesman. While the commercial interest was his overarching goal, the ethical aspects of business did not constitute a principal matter, as becomes evident from the above-discussed. Rekhnevskaja-Mei provided her interpretation of his intentions:

²⁷⁶ *Modnyi magazin*, 1879, p. 46. Софья Рехневская (Мей) обладает исключительными правами собственности на рисунки французского журнала *Revue de la Mode*, на основании письма от редакции этого журнала от 18 апреля 1877 и Конвенции о литературной и художественной собственности, подписанной между Россией и Францией 25 марта 1861].

²⁷⁷ Ibid. [двухлетняя переписка между редакциями *Revue de la Mode* и «Модным магазином» явственно указывает их профессиональные отношения]; [защитить наши совместные права от контрафакторов].

Why did Mt. Hoppe want to reprint the illustrations of *Modnyi magazin* when he had so many of his own? This is very clear. *Modnyi magazin* published in its pages *Parisian* fashions while *Modnyi svet* reprinted the illustrations of the *German* magazine *Modenwelt*. This gave the former an advantage over the latter. Such advantage bothered Mr. Goppe [...] and he] started to reprint the *Parisian* illustrations in order not to be a step behind of *Modnyi magazin*. Of course, he could have borrowed his illustrations from other French magazines but then he would not have harmed in any way *Modnyi magazin* which is competing with him – and his goal would not have been achieved.²⁷⁸

Finally, another point in this case further demonstrates the significance of *Modnyi magazin* in the development of the Russian fashion press market and its links to the European one. In 1883, soon after Rekhnevskaja-Mei transferred her publishing rights to a merchant Vasilii Turba, the latter sold it to Goppe who then merged it with *Modnyi svet*. Goppe incorporated into the new magazine not only the name of *Modnyi magazin* but also the *Parisian* contracts established by Rekhnevskaja-Mei and presented it as the major trading token of his rebranded periodical. In the subscription announcement of the new magazine, Goppe declared that ‘*Modnyi svet i Modnyi magazin* [was] truly the best and the most comprehensive Russian magazine on fashion’.²⁷⁹ He based this claim on ‘[d]irect relations of the editorial office with the best *Parisian* fashion enterprises [and] contracts with the best French fashion magazines, such as *Revue de la mode*, *La Mode illustrée*, *La Saison* and others’.²⁸⁰

In all these cases, it was Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s mediating habitus that enabled *Modnyi magazin*’s affiliations with the main *Parisian* magazines. First, her awareness of the publishing business in Russia, which resulted from her marriage to Lev Mei and belonging to the publishing circles, helped her to establish the initial links with the French market. Second, her proficiency in French and socialization in the European code of conduct – as much as her extensive knowledge of the European fashion press market – were the conditions which later allowed her to maintain the ongoing relations with main *Parisian* magazines. Thanks to Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s active

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* [Что за охота была г-ну Гоппе перепечатывать картины «Модного магазина», когда у него так много своих? Это очень понятно. «Модный магазин» помещал на своих страницах парижские моды- это была его специальность, а в «Модном свете» перепечатывались рисунки немецкого журнала «Modenwelt», что давало первому преимущество над вторым. Такое преимущество мешало г-ну Гоппе [...] стал перепечатывать парижские рисунки, чтобы ни на шаг не отстать от «Модного магазина». Конечно, он мог бы заимствовать свои рисунки и их других французских журналов, то тогда бы он ничем не повредил конкурирующему с ним «Модному магазину» - и цель его не была бы достигнута].

²⁷⁹ Subscription announcement for the year 1885, *Modnyi svet i Modnyi magazin*, 1884, no. 23. [В настоящее время «Модный свет и модный магазин» [...] действительно лучший и самый полный журнал моды]

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* [Прямые сношения Редакции с первыми парижскими фирмами мод, договоры с лучшими модными журналами Франции, например Le Revue de la Mode, La Mode Illustrée, La Saison и пр].

mediation between the local and foreign publishing fields *Modnyi magazin* became the first Russian magazine that was firmly integrated in the European fashion press market.

Targeting policy: between the elitist and popular fashion press

In the turbulent post-Emancipation era, the local socio-economic context was changing rapidly, unpredictably, and irrevocably. *Modnyi magazin* was launched in the Era of Grand Reforms, just one year after the abolition of serfdom, which provoked a profound transformation of the socio-economic life of the Russian Empire. The sudden impoverishment of many genteel families was one of its most immediate consequences. As argued by Ruane, ‘the days of parties, balls, and visits to the *dacha* were now threatened by the very real concerns about how the elite were going to sustain themselves economically without serf labor’.²⁸¹ As ‘the days of parties’ were over, so were those of the elitist fashion press targeting at the economically abundant, idle, and worldly social class. *Modnyi magazin* was the first Russian fashion magazine reflecting this profound shift. In contrast to its predecessors catering specifically to the interests of the wealthy nobility (e.g. *Moda* [Fashion] (1851-1861)), Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s magazine purposefully targeted beyond this utterly narrow social circle and diversified the fashion press’ audience by making it accessible to women of varied background.

While it is impossible to reconstruct the accurate picture of the readership of the magazine, the editor herself argued that it consisted of women of different socio-economic standing: ‘starting from the higher aristocracy and ending with modest households that do not have an opportunity to pay dressmakers’.²⁸² This novel approach became possible thanks to the editor’s mediating habitus. The discrepancies between her social and economic capital enabled Rekhnevskaiia-Mei to perceive the needs of different groups of women and merge them within the single publishing and editorial framework. On the one hand, her ‘youth spent in the best circles’ informed her affiliation with the St. Petersburg high society and her leaning towards it. As argued by Polianskaia, her sister admired the aristocratic society and lifestyle.²⁸³ On the other hand, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s gentry origin and desire to follow the first-rank fashion at times contrasted sharply with the constrained financial situation, particularly the extreme need which she faced during the years of her marriage to Lev Mei. This conflict between high social and low economic capital reflected the situation in which many gentry women across the Empire found themselves in the aftermath of the Emancipation of

²⁸¹ Ruane, ‘The Development of a Fashion Press’, 87.

²⁸² Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 390. [начиная от высшей аристократии и кончая скромными семействами, не имеющими возможности платить портнихам].

²⁸³ Polianskaia, ‘To the Biography of L.A. Mei’.

serfs. The editor's personal experience helped her 'guess the demands of the public' and shape the editorial framework which was equally relevant for 'the wealthy as well as for the poor'.²⁸⁴

The heterogeneous targeting policy of *Modnyi magazin* was enabled by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's innovative editorial program. As was pointed out in *Russkaia starina*, the key perceived purpose of the magazine was 'to provide its female readers with the practical knowledge necessary for every woman, regardless which class she belong[ed] to. It was the main idea of the publication and was integrated into the program of *Modnyi magazin*'.²⁸⁵ While the luxurious fashion plates and depiction of the latest fashions catered to the needs of 'high-standing and wealthy persons', Rekhnevskaiia-Mei suggested to those who could not afford a dressmaker to put aside traditional women's needlework and learn how to make and remake their own dresses. For this, Mei provided a wide range of fashion patterns, adopted from the Parisian fashion magazines and supplied to the editorial office by Parisian and Petersburg department stores and dressmakers. These patterns, their detailed explanations and meticulous guidance on how to realize them at home constituted the core of the magazine's program on fashion: '[t]he main goal of *Modnyi magazin* consists in providing women with an opportunity to make their dresses at home and facilitate the reducing of their expenses on the toilette'.²⁸⁶

Apart from the influence of the new Western fashion press targeted at the middle-class women, which I will discuss in detail in the second chapter, to a significant extent it was Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's own experience with sewing and remaking her dresses that informed the practical component of her magazine. As evidenced by her sister, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei had 'a big talent' to needlework. The editor herself referred to the years of her youth when she, spending months and even years in the countryside 'without living the place', was sewing her clothes exactly in the way which she later suggested her female readers:

How many charming outfits I managed to make [...] from old, stale items, which returned in fashion and [became] unrecognizable after their re-cutting. Now, when I publish my own magazine, I am guided by my practical knowledge and constantly keep in mind the achieving of the known goal.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Subscription announcement for 1863, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, no. 22. [угадать требования публики]; [как богатым так и бедным].

²⁸⁵ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [необходимых каждой женщине, к какому бы классу она ни принадлежала. Это было главной мыслью издания и входило в программу «Модного магазина»].

²⁸⁶ Subscription announcement for 1873, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, no. 23. [Главная цель «Модного магазина» состоит в том, чтобы давать подписчицам возможность шить все свои наряды дома и способствовать сокращению их туалетных расходов].

²⁸⁷ 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 194. [Сколько прелестных костюмов выходило у меня [...] из старых, залежавшихся вещей, вновь вошедших в моду и неузнаваемых при новой перекройке. Теперь, издавая свой

Not only Rekhnevskaja-Mei encouraged her readers by referring to her own example – she also took an active part in helping her readers to follow it. She emphasized that fashion patterns were never reprinted in *Modnyi magazin* ‘without checking and correcting’ and, furthermore, were often composed locally by the editorial staff ‘after the best models – particularly for those willing to sew their outfits at home – with an explanatory text for cutting and sewing’.²⁸⁸ Providing patterns for ladies’ needlework was among the constitutive components of the elitist fashion press of the first generation. However, such a systemic promotion of hands-on sewing among the relatively broad female audience was the innovation of *Modnyi magazin*. Therefore, while her personal experience affiliated Rekhnevskaja-Mei with many of her female compatriots, her practical skills allowed her to offer them a viable solution to their dilemma.

Therefore, the magazine’s fashion section combined expensive Parisian illustrations and discussions of the latest fashion styles with practical hands-on sewing allowing to reconstruct them on a low budget. As a result of this inclusive approach equally relevant for women of varied background, *Modnyi magazin* differed from the preceding elitist fashion press in a significant way: it targeted women as a social group rather than the nobility as a social class. In this wider sense, too, it was the editor’s unique life path that informed this innovative approach. At different periods of her life, Rekhnevskaja-Mei experienced the life of a woman of varied socio-economic circumstances in both Russian capitals as well as in the province. Her social belonging ranged from the pre-emancipatory high Petersburg society, in which she was raised and educated and with which she kept connections throughout her life, to living in the provincial gentry estate during her youth, to the ‘half-hungry life of the St. Petersburg *intelligentsia*’²⁸⁹ and, finally, to working with poor gentry-women in the framework of her philanthropic initiatives. The sense of personal affiliation helped her shape the idiosyncratic editorial program: first, the self-positioning of *Modnyi magazin* as ‘a good society journal’ reflected Mei’s awareness of the high-society tastes, second, her experience of living in different socio-economic and geographical circumstances informed her conviction that a woman could be well-dressed in any of them, and, third, her mastery of the practical skill allowed her to provide them with a pathway towards achieving this.

Finally, ‘a good society journal’ set the standard for the aspiring female readers. Apart from the impoverishment of the gentry, the socio-economic developments in the second half of the century also entailed other changes in the readership of the fashion press: the increasing female

журнал, я руководствуюсь своими практическими сведениями и постоянно имею в виду достижение известной цели].

²⁸⁸ Subscription announcement for 1865, *Modnyi magazin*, 1864. [без проверки и исправления]; Subscription announcement for 1872, *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, p. 80. [по лучшим моделям – собственно для желающих шить свои наряды дома – с объяснительным текстом для кройки и шитья].

²⁸⁹ Dmitrieva, ‘Lev Mei’.

literacy and, most importantly, the growth of the wealthy city estates, fostered by the industrialization of Russia in the post-Emancipation era. According to Catriona Kelly, this led to an emergence of a new public: ‘those with money to spend and little idea of how to spend it’, who ‘craved refinement, but lacked the immersion in literature, fine art, history, and ethics’.²⁹⁰ In the decades when *Modnyi magazin* was published, women of this diverse social group were becoming the most eager consumers of the fashion press. For example, Rekhnevskaja-Mei mentioned ‘frequent requests concerning [a recommendation about] works ‘on the rules of the worldly etiquette’.²⁹¹ Such requests were typical for the rising social classes but not for the gentry, however impoverished. In this respect, Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s magazine catered to women of varied means belonging to her own social class – but also to an emerging pool of ‘aspiring’ female readers from an even less coherent socio-economic background. In this context, her magazine’s attractive but vague self-positioning as a ‘good society journal’ set the standard which reflected the aesthetic code of the upper class while keeping it open to both the women of modest means from both and the aspiring readers from the middle estates.

In the light of the above-said, *Modnyi magazin* belonged simultaneously to the first and the second generations of the Russian fashion press: while maintaining the high society as the ultimate target, it also made it accessible to the wider audience. Furthermore, as a result of its focus on dress-making, *Modnyi magazin* became a specifically women’s magazine, in contrast to, for example, *Moda* which catered to the interests of the worldly nobility. Although the magazine, as becomes clear from the correspondence section, had men among its readers (although primarily in the first years) and sometimes resorted to a marketing instrument of presenting it a ‘magazine for the family reading’, this one-woman journal was clearly a publication for women and about women. This in itself fostered the formation of women’s sense of affiliation beyond their class belonging, as will be discussed later in the dissertation. Therefore, while I interchangeably call *Modnyi magazin* a fashion and a women’s magazine, this seemingly obvious equation owes not to the periodical genre itself but to Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s editorial strategy.

To sum up, the fashion-related agenda of the magazine resulted from Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s expertise and life experience, which allowed her to shape her magazine as an unprecedented direct bridge between the world’s fashion metropolis and Russian women of varied socio-economic background. The textual part of the *Modnyi magazin*’s fashion section – a regular fashion column written for every issue by Rekhnevskaja-Mei herself – constitutes the subject of the second chapter

²⁹⁰ Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: advice literature, polite culture, and gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 157.

²⁹¹ Untitled announcement, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 96. [вследствие частых запросов, касательно сочинения «о правилах светского этикета»].

of this dissertation. In it, I further discuss the editor's mediation between local and international, or 'peripheral' and 'metropolitan' socio-cultural fields and fashion press markets as well as between different (and sometimes conflicting) interests and needs of her diverse target audience.

2.3 *Modnyi magazin* as a women's journal

While the fashion section was composed solely Sofia by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, the literary section of *Modnyi magazin* sheds light on another aspect of her mediating editorial habitus: engaging contributors from her diverse social circle and bringing their ideas and expertise together under the umbrella of her editorial agenda. This resulted in the literary section becoming a journal within a journal: targeted at the female audience of the fashion press yet discussing anything but fashion. In this regard, *Modnyi magazin* was not only a fashion magazine but also the first Russian women's journal in a full sense of the term: created by a woman and for women and focused on topics of women's interest beyond fashion and housekeeping.

Apart from fashion-and-literary and needlework magazines, before the 1890s there were only three periodical publications in Russia that targeted specifically at women. All three of them aimed at discussing women's education and social role – and none of them became popular or long-lasting. *Rassvet*, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, was launched in 1859 and published the educating materials for girls above fourteen years old. Barbara Heldt Monter argues that it was 'the first journal for women in Russia to have a wider scope, to include readings outside the domestic and literary arts'.²⁹² The emergence of this magazine reflected the ongoing debates on the woman question and played an important role in pointing out at the emerging female readership for 'serious' content. However, it did not manage to attract a broad readership and was closed in 1862. The first attempt to publish a journal for adult women was the short-lived *Zhenskii vestnik* ([Women's Herald], 1866-1868) edited by Nikolai Messarosh. Although it promised to its readers to discuss contemporary socio-economic limitations of Russian women, according to the assessments of contemporaries as well as scholars it failed to develop a coherent editorial program.²⁹³ The next attempt to launch a journal for women took place almost fifteen years later and was hardly more successful. *Drug zhenshchin* ([Women's Friend], 1882-1884) was an unprofitable publication edited and published in Moscow by Maria Boguslavskaiia who later passed her editorial duties to Anna Volkova. Both women tried to distinguish their journal from

²⁹² Monter, 'Rassvet', 77.

²⁹³ Irina Iukina, 'Дискурс женской прессы XIX века' [Discourse of the Nineteenth-Century Women's Press], in *Женские и гендерные исследования* [Women and Gender Studies], no. 5 (2000): 34; Victoria Bonner-Smeiukha, 'Отечественные женские журналы: Историко-типологическое исследование' [National Women's Magazines: Classification and Typological Aspect (1779-2000)] (Ph.D. diss., Rostov-na-Donu university, 2001), 38-39.

the conventional St. Petersburg women's press but, despite their sincere efforts and dedication to the emancipatory project, its didactic tone did not appeal to their female compatriots.²⁹⁴ After two years, the journal failed due to the lack of interest from the audience.

This brief overview demonstrates that in the decades when *Modnyi magazin* was published the journals which aimed at raising women's awareness and supporting their social and intellectual aspirations neither could develop a viable program nor found enthusiasm among their potential readers. The only demanded and thus commercially viable periodicals for women were fashion and needlework magazines. At the same time, both Russian and Western scholars argue that the mainstream women's press generally ignored the contemporary intellectual debates and provided women with traditional patriarchal and domestic ideals.²⁹⁵ However, in contrast to these persistent assumptions, Rekhnevskaja-Mei positioned *Modnyi magazin* as a women's guide in all the domains of their interest: in fashion as much as in cultural and social life. The editor outlined her vision of a contemporary fashion magazine in the following way:

In our time, a fashion magazine could not be regarded as a frivolous or trivial publication. Of course, it does not deviate from its primary task, i.e. it does not stop being a guide and advisor of a woman in one of the main life necessities – clothing. Apart from that, the program of such magazine includes useful advices concerning woman's role at home and in society. However, despite the practical element, which constitutes its specialization, it should deliver an entertaining family reading as well as serve as an echo of social life. This is the task of our publication.²⁹⁶

Marks notices that the initial format of *Modnyi magazin* combined the features of two different types of periodicals: Western-inspired illustrated fashion magazines, on the one hand, and Russian literary-philosophical thick journals, on the other. She thus places *Modnyi magazin* among the first Russian journals that aimed at shaping women's opinions, which allowed the magazine to establish its niche 'among educated women'.²⁹⁷ In this context, *Modnyi magazin* presents an exceptional case of a middle-way journal, both appealing to the general female

²⁹⁴ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 104-107.

²⁹⁵ See Iukina, 'Discourse'; Rochelle Ruthchild, 'Feminist Publications and Publishers in St. Petersburg, 1899-1917.' *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 33, no. 1 (2006): 27-48.

²⁹⁶ Subscription announcement for 1863, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, no. 24. [В наше время, на модный журнал нельзя смотреть как на пустячное или банальное издание. Конечно, он не уклоняется от главной своей задачи, т. е. не перестает быть руководителем и советником женщины в одной из необходимейших жизненных потребностей – в одежде. Кроме того, в программу такого журнала входят полезные советы относительно роли женщины в домашнем быту и в свете. Однако помимо практического элемента, составляющего его специальность, он должен доставлять занимательное семейное чтение, а также служить отголоском общественной жизни. Такова задача нашего издания]

²⁹⁷ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 100.

audience and reflecting the contemporary intellectual and cultural debates, on women's social status in particular. Two factors contributed to the high-quality and socially-oriented angle of *Modnyi magazin*'s literary section: the historical moment and Rekhnevskaja-Mei's social and cultural capital.

Rekhnevskaja-Mei's social and cultural capital behind the literary section of *Modnyi magazin*

In the subscription announcement for the second publishing year Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, on behalf of the editorial staff, claimed firmly: 'The standpoint of our magazine has been clearly expressed: we passionately sympathize with everything that serves women's development, improvement of their everyday life, both domestic and social, and affirmation of their human rights'.²⁹⁸ *Modnyi magazin* was founded at the height of Russia's most liberal times: one year after the abolition of serfdom and in the midst of vibrant and intellectually intense public debates which started in the mid-1850s and, among other topics, decisively put the Russian woman question on the social agenda. This exceptional moment allowed the editor to openly raise such progressive questions as women's emancipation without the risk of losing her publishing license. According to Marks, the magazine's initial format combined the entertaining purpose of a fashion publication with the socially-engaged rhetoric: '*Modnyi magazin* [...] reflected on the questions of women's role in reformist Russia and urged readers to be responsible, critical, and intelligent'.²⁹⁹

This rhetoric owed to Rekhnevskaja-Mei's social and cultural capital that allowed her to fill the literary section with high-quality contributions and determined its socially-oriented angle. In the first years of publication, the editor relied on contributions from well-known St. Petersburg literati from her husband's circle to fill in the literary section of *Modnyi magazin*. According to *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, '[h]er salon was frequented by a circle of famous writers who were gracious towards her; among them were Nekrasov, Pisemskiy, F. Berg, Vsev.[Vsevolod] Krestovskiy and others, who helped her and participated in her journal'.³⁰⁰ In the beginning, the literary section was filled with original and translated pieces prepared by Lev Mei and his friends. In particular, Vsevolod Krestovskiy was the author of the magazine's witty social life reviews. Fiodor Berg, Nikolai Nekrasov, Apollon Maikov and Vladimir Golovin published their original

²⁹⁸ Subscription announcement for 1863, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, no. 23. [Направление нашего журнала уже довольно ясно высказалось — мы горячо сочувствуем всему, что может содействовать развитию женщин, улучшению их быта, как домашнего так и общественного, и утверждению за ними человеческих прав].

²⁹⁹ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 95.

³⁰⁰ 'Рехневская, София Григорьевна' [Rekhnevskaja, Sofia Grigorievna]. In *Русский биографический словарь* [Russian biographical dictionary], vol. 16 (Imperial Russian Historical Society Publishing, 1913) 145. [Салон ее посещался дружественно к ней расположенным кружком известных литераторов, между которыми были Некрасов, Писемский, О. Берг, Всеv. Крестовский и другие, помогавшие ей и принимавшие участие в ее журнале].

poems in the magazine. Nekrasov's favourable attitude to the magazine was expressed in the way he tenderly mentioned 'innocent *Modnyi magazin* (of the [female] publisher Sofia Mei)' [Невинный «Модный магазин» (Издательницы Софьи Мей)] in one of his poems.³⁰¹ This welcoming support and willingness to contribute attributed a precious symbolic capital to a newly-launched magazine: the participation of well-known writers 'had given the publication prestige and authority'.³⁰² These writers also contributed to *Modnyi magazin* with their translations of prose and poetry from English, German, French, and Swedish (among others, the works of Victor Hugo, George Byron, Charles Dickens, Léon Gozlan, Frans Franzén, Sandor Petofi).

This supports Marks' contention that the editor's literary acquaintances were a key factor behind the magazine's intellectual agenda and popularity among educated women. This program remained valid for the entire publishing period, long after Lev Mei's friends stopped actively participating in his wife's journal. This sheds light on other resources to which Rekhnevskaiia-Mei referred in shaping her magazine. The magazine published extracts from Henri James, Madam de Stael, Heinrich Heine, Jules Verne, Victor Hugo. Several writers were the favorite literary 'heroes' of *Modnyi magazin*: the names of Ivan Tourgeniev, Emile Zola, George Sand, Charles Dickens were regularly mentioned in the articles of different sort, the quotes by them were inserted among other materials, the excerpts from their works as well as the new related to them were frequently included in the literary section. Despite multiple (mostly occasional) contributors, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei herself prepared the majority of translations for her magazine. Already before she started her magazine, she published several literary translations from English and French in other journals, although *Istoricheskii vestnik* explains, that 'separately, under the name of Sofia Grigorievna Mei, was published only one book in 1875, *Manuscript of Mademoiselle Kochiubei, a Novel by Princess A. Kochiubei, Translation from French*'.³⁰³ One year before that, the extracts from this novel were published in *Modnyi magazin*.³⁰⁴ Another person who regularly translated for *Modnyi magazin* over a long period of time was Sofia Voskresenskaia, the magazine's permanent contributor from the late 1860s and throughout the 1870s. During these years, her translations from English filled

³⁰¹ Nikolai Nekrasov, *Court (A Modern Story)* [Суд (Современная повесть)], first published in 1868. This poem was satire against the introduction of the new press law of 1865, which gave the state more power to intervene in the publishing domain. In Nekrasov's manuscript, *Modnyi magazin* was ironically called 'criminal'. See Nikolai Nekrasov, 'Суд (Современная повесть)' [Trial (A Modern Tale)], in *Н.А. Некрасов. Полное собрание сочинений в 15 томах* [N.A. Nekrasov. *Complete Collection of Works and Letters in 15 volumes*], vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Nauka Publishing House, 198), 405.

³⁰² Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 101.

³⁰³ 'Miscellanea', *Historical herald*, 1889, 253. [Отдельно, с именем Софьи Григорьевны Мей вышла только одна книга в 1875 году: «Рукопись мадмуазель Камиль, роман княгини А. Кочубей, перевод с французского»].

³⁰⁴ An interesting fact is that many years before that, Sofia Grigorievna, when she was still a child, met Kochiubei at the house of Prince Vasilchikov. Most probably she maintained relationship with both, hence the translation of the novel.

many pages of the literary section. In 1875, the editor introduced her in a separate announcement: 'From the next issue begins a new, previously unpublished English novel *Enchantment* – full of interest and life truth – in a literary translation of our talented female co-worker S.I. Voskresenskaia'.³⁰⁵ Such translations were not always signed, but an increase in the number of materials adopted from the English-speaking context in these years suggests Voskresenskaia's active involvement. Most probably, the two women divided the tasks: Rekhnevskaja-Mei translated from French and Voskresenskaia from English. Regular inclusion of previously unpublished translations (this was emphasized by the editorial board) allows to regard *Modnyi magazin* as a medium through which the contemporary Western culture directly reached female Russian readers. For example, in 1881, when for one year the literary supplement was published as a separate *Literary Collection* [Литературный сборник], its program included works by French journalist Henri Rochefort, Scottish war correspondent Archibald Forbes, American writers Bret Harte and Edgar Poe, Russian writer Aleksandr Shkliarevskiy and others. In this respect, *Modnyi magazin* followed the 'enlightening' trend of translating Western literature for a broader audience which was discussed in the previous chapter.

Although *Modnyi magazin* regularly published literary pieces (first primarily poetry and short stories, then later, in the 1870s, longer novels which were published throughout several consecutive issues), the central place in its literary section was occupied by publicist articles: varied thematic features and regular journalistic columns, original and translated from the European languages, written by the editor herself as well as by contributors (occasional and permanent, both male and female). While in the early 1860s primarily male writers from Lev Mei's literary circle were among the magazine's occasional contributors, the 1870s were marked by an increased number of female names, although the majority of them were abbreviated or substituted with female pseudonyms. For instance, in a regular column called *From Afar* [Издадека], a certain *Doch' Evvy* [Eva's Daughter] shared with Russian readers her insider view on upper-class Parisian society. As became clear from private correspondence, this column was written and sent to Rekhnevskaja-Mei directly from Paris by Countess Rostopchina, a Russian woman writer who lived in the French capital and was well-known in its literary circles as *Comtesse Lydie Rostopchine*. It was her mother, Evdokiia Rostopchina, the close friend of Lev Mei, who in the 1851 was a guest of honour at Sofia Grigorievna's wedding.³⁰⁶ Rekhnevskaja-Mei apparently maintained friendship with her daughter and in the 1870s engaged her as a contributor to both her

³⁰⁵ Untitled announcement, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 379. [Со следующего номера начнется новый, неизданный английский роман: «Очарование» - исполненный интереса и жизненной правды – в художественном переводе талантливой нашей сотрудницы, С.И. Воскресенской.].

³⁰⁶ See Chapter 1.

magazine and her philanthropic initiative. These details, discovered unexpectedly thanks to a few short letters preserved in one of St. Petersburg's archives, shed light on Rekhnevskaja-Mei's complex mediating role which shaped the foundation of her magazine's rich and varied content.³⁰⁷ Another example is a series of travel notes called *Forty Days in New York* in which countess Suvorova specially for the female readers of *Modnyi magazin* describes the mores of their American counterparts. Although in this case I have not found any evidence which would allow to identify the personality of this author, the name and title of this woman contributor allow to assume that she belonged to the circle of St. Petersburg noble-ladies with many of whom Rekhnevskaja-Mei was personally acquainted. Therefore, the content of the magazine depended on the contributors, whom the editor wanted and managed to engage, i.e. on her vast and diverse social circle. In addition, the format of personal travel notes was generally popular in *Modnyi magazin*. For example, Voskresenskaia described her travelling in Italy and Rekhnevskaja-Mei herself reported on her trips to France. This genre complemented regular feuilletons on foreign fashion and social life and thus fostered the magazine's image as a bridge between Russian readers and the geographically remote Western world.



Modnyi magazin, 1873, no 5. A fashion plate, a title page, and a table of contents

At the same time, Rekhnevskaja-Mei also distinguished her magazine from other publications, Russian or foreign, and claimed her right to shape her magazine according to her vision. The correspondence section provides several important insights into the ways in which the editor understood – and communicated – her role. For instance, in 1863, a female reader expressed her disappointment that *Modnyi magazin*'s social life observer discussed the life of a St. Petersburg proletariat in one of his reviews. The woman suggested that 'he would be better to talk about the

³⁰⁷ 'Letters to Rekhnevskaja. Letters from Rostopchina L.A.', f.257, d.48. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House).

French court and similar fine subjects'.³⁰⁸ Responding to this complaint, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei argued:

But this would be despotism, a constraint of freedom, don't you agree? Why should not the feuilletonist [фельетонист] talk about the Petersburg proletarians if he chooses? We can't oblige him to talk exclusively about the French court and fine subjects – and we don't see why he should not about everyday troubles as well; most importantly, we cannot dictate to our co-workers [how to write] their articles. Journalists are not the farmers and employees are not in their unconditional obedience.³⁰⁹

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's decisive defence of journalistic freedom of speech in fact implicitly defended her editorial freedom to determine the content of the magazine, not only directly but also through engaging and giving the floor to selected contributors. Furthermore, this quote shows that, although the editor was certainly well-aware of her readers' interest to the Parisian fashion scene, local socio-cultural developments occupied a solid place in her editorial priorities. The most important here is, nevertheless, the fact that Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, in line with her statement that 'a modern fashion magazine could not be regarded as a trivial publication', claimed her freedom to stretch the limits of this very genre where she found it necessary and appropriate. Thus, her confidence in her fashion sense, literary judgements, and social standpoint, combined with the magazine's popularity and prestige, allowed her to question the socio-cultural marginality of the fashion press genre and to negotiate its boundaries. Following her editorial vision and building on her cultural capital and social networks, she shaped *Modnyi magazin* as 'an echo of social life' through which her female readers acquired news, ideas, and food for reflection on various topics far beyond needlework and housekeeping. In this respect, it is interesting what the magazine, counterintuitively, did not include: that is, information on child-rearing. One could expect to see it in the magazine targeted at women, instructing them how to sew their clothes, and giving occasional advices on housekeeping and cooking (even if, in many cases, they were to be passed to servants). Nevertheless, there was almost no information on children's upbringing throughout the twenty years, except a couple of brief notes and occasional reviews of children's fashion styles, included 'at the request of the readers'. In contrast to the above-discussed domains, childrearing was not an area in which Rekhnevskaiia-Mei had any personal expertise. Despite two marriages, she did not have children, therefore, neither the subject attracted her attention nor she considered

³⁰⁸ 'Responses of the editorial board', *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 68. [лучше бы он говорил о французском дворе, и тому подобных изящных предметах].

³⁰⁹ Ibid. [Ведь это уж, согласитесь – деспотизм, стеснение свободы. Отчего ж фельетонисту не поговорить о петербургских пролетариях, если до них дошла речь? Мы не можем обязать его говорить об одном только французском дворе и изящных предметах – мы не видим, почему не говорить кстати и о житейских тревожениях; а главное, мы не можем диктовать своим сотрудникам из статей. Журналисты не плантаторы и сотрудники не находятся у них в безусловном повиновении].

herself an expert possessing the credibility to publish any notes on such an important subject (even if written by someone else).

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei bold editorial statement of 1863, in which she spoke about women's role in 'domestic as well social life', was the only time when such claims were so directly expressed in the official self-positioning. By the mid-1860s the temporarily loosened censorship of the Great Reforms' era was tightened again. Therefore, throughout the 1860s and 1870s, the issues related to the woman question were almost never mentioned in the subscription announcements again. The only few exceptions happened in the second half of the 1870s, when they were outlined in an utterly discrete way: as 'charity' or 'an overview on women's activity' in the end of a long list of the magazine's components, among such subjects as housekeeping, poems, and scientific discoveries. Therefore, Marks understandably concludes that from the late 1860s the magazine started to 'lose its edge': '[t]he return of stricter censorship meant that Rekhnevskaiia-Mei could not continue to invoke revolution and emancipation to fire the imagination of readers'.³¹⁰ However, an overview of the magazine's structure gives reasons to argue that it continued to discuss the woman question even in the 1870s, the decade marked by the repressive state control over public life. Although negotiating women's disadvantaged position was not reflected in the program, the magazine's content suggests a different story.

The journalistic materials further reveal the editor's social agenda. To begin with, throughout the years *Modnyi magazin* published multiple articles on women's education and work, both original and reprinted from Russian and foreign newspapers targeted at the general audience (e.g. *Vr'emia* [Time], *Golos* [Voice], *Figaro*). Even more interestingly, between 1869 and 1875, one of the key components of the magazine was a column called 'Letters to the Province'. Published in almost every issue, these 'Letters' were in fact a column dedicated to the unfolding of the emerging women's movement, in Russia as well as in Western countries. The 'Letters' were written by Sofia Voskresenskaia, who was not only a member of *Modnyi magazin*'s editorial staff, but also Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fellow philanthropist. This becomes evident when her name appears among the members of the Circle for Patronage of Young Unsheltered Girls in St. Petersburg initiated and led by *Modnyi magazin*'s editor. Since no archival information was found on Voskresenskaia, is it difficult to say whether she met Rekhnevskaiia-Mei within the charitable circle (e.g., The Society for the Support of Poor Women) and then started to work on her journal or whether Sofia Grigorievna engaged her co-worker to take part in her social activity (as it was the case with Lidiia Rostopchina, for example). In any case, Voskresenskaia's 'Letters to the Province' focused particularly on covering women's charitable activities and popularized the

³¹⁰ Marks, 'Provid[ing] Amusement', 101.

emerging phenomenon of organized pro-women's, or feminist, philanthropy. Furthermore, one could often find in the magazine's pages various announcements and advertisements from the fashion atelier and fashion store affiliated with Rekhnevskia-Mei's St. Ksenia's Shelter. Nicely framed, they caught attention and were often symbolically placed right next to the fashion column signed by Sofia Mei. Was it a mere promotion of Sofia Grigorievna's own initiative or part of a broader agenda in support of women's emancipation, veiled by discussions on a traditional woman's charity? Regardless of the answer, it is evident that Sofia Rekhnevskia-Mei's social interests found their expression in the magazine. This fact is the least (if at all) acknowledged component of the editorial agenda of *Modnyi magazin*. Nevertheless, since on the emerging Russian women's press market there was no successful publication dedicated to the emerging women's movement, it is of outstanding social importance. The role of *Modnyi magazin* as a medium between early Russian feminists and 'conventional' female readers of the fashion press constitutes the focus of the Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Concluding remarks

To sum up, there was a direct link between the personality of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, on the one hand, and *Modnyi magazin*, on the other. The magazine's rich and varied content owed to Rekhnevskaja-Mei's capital as an intellectual and to her editorial habitus, which allowed her to mediate between the Russian and European publishing fields and women of different socio-economic standing, engage contributors who helped her broaden the range of issues covered in its pages and, most importantly, bridge the generally unrelated domains of fashion and needlework with intellectual debates. On the one hand, this program allowed the magazine to remain on the market, despite the difficulties which it faced in the second decade due to the emergence of strong and more technologically advanced competitors. On the other hand, its commercial viability (although decreasing) provided her with the platform through which she, as an intellectual, could 'reach out to the many' and pass her unique standpoint on to her readers.³¹¹

As a result, the editor's 'highly differentiated, multiple habitus'³¹² enabled her to shape an idiosyncratic printed platform where varied contemporary discourses on femininity merged within a single publishing and editorial strategy. In this respect, *Modnyi magazin* could be seen as a cultural 'melting pot' with its rhetoric being located at the cross-roads among the cultural flows of different nature: local and foreign, domestic and social, related to fashion as well as to the contemporary intellectual debates, to fashion plates as much as to the woman question. Speaking in Hannerz' terms, such cultural 'entanglements, involving often mutually contradictory tendencies' arguably formatively impacted the magazine's rhetoric on its central subject – femininity.³¹³ While in the Section One I discussed Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's individual capital and its decisive role in shaping the overall editorial program of *Modnyi magazin*, in the rest of the dissertation I focus on the original gendered discourse that resulted from it. For this, I consecutively study fashion and literary sections and discuss the journalistic and publicist materials written by the editor and other contributors.

³¹¹ Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1992), 258.

³¹² Matthew Philpotts, 'The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus' in *The Modern Humanities Language Review* 107, no. 1 (January 2012): 43.

³¹³ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 51.

Section Two. ‘The Secret of Parisian Women’: Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s discourse on fashionable femininity

Introduction

Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s fashion reports, or editorials constituted the central column of *Modnyi magazin*. This was the only column invariably published in almost every issue of the magazine, and it was through it that the editor addressed her readers directly and regularly. Fashion reports focused on discussing major developments in fashion – the domain that Rekhnevskaiia-Mei presented as the magazine’s core ‘specialization’ [специальность]. While coloured and black-and-white fashion illustrations provided visual representations of styles and were described in detail in a special section called ‘Explanation of the patterns’ [Объяснение рисунков], fashion editorials served to introduce and comment on fashionable novelties commonly originating from Paris. Presented as knowledgeable summaries of the most recent fashion news, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s reports outlined the ‘general character of fashion’, doing so, as I will demonstrate, in the way which the editor found most appropriate and relevant for her Russian audience. In her own words, writing these fashion columns was ‘a duty which [she] voluntarily assumed and which consist[ed] in grouping in a few lines all the details and information regarding fashion, so that it satisfie[d] each and every one of [her female readers]’.³¹⁴ She further described how composing this column was not an easy task, as it required identifying major European, particularly Parisian, fashion trends while simultaneously adjusting them to the Russian context and keeping in mind the varied – and sometimes conflicting – expectations, needs, and means of her diverse audience.

In Section Two, I explore in detail the interplay between these two levels of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s socio-cultural mediation: merging European and Russian (‘metropolitan’ and ‘provincial’) fashion scenes and reconciling the discrepancies among Russian women themselves (nobility and ‘women of the middle circle’, wealthy and of modest means, metropolitan and provincial). I particularly focus on the model of femininity that the editor shaped by refracting foreign discourse in line with her editorial agenda and turning them into idiosyncratic socio-cultural forms. Section Two is divided into three chapters, in which I consecutively study Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s fashion column as a platform for creative socio-cultural mediation, or cultural brokerage. In Chapter 3, I focus on fashion reporting, or transmitting the information, where I analyse two

³¹⁴ Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Моды’ [Fashions], *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 194. [обязанность, которую я добровольно приняла на себя и которая состоит в том, чтобы сгруппировать в нескольких строках все подробности и сведения, по части мод, так, чтобы удовлетворить каждую из вас].

determinant factors of her fashion column: her sources of information and the perceived expectations of her target audience. In this respect, this chapter deals with her approach to the initial ‘input’. Chapter 4, in contrast, deals with her original ‘output’, particularly her idiosyncratic critical discourse, or the system of standards, values, and representations which she elaborated as the point of reference in her discussions on fashion and fashionable femininity. In Chapter 5, I discuss how Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s fashion discourse addressed the social peripherality of her readers as women. Before digging into the details of the magazine’s fashion rhetoric, I first briefly discuss the historical context and my methodological considerations for this chapter.

Russian fashion journalism: symbolic meanings behind metropolitan fashion, regional cultural brokerage, and gender norms

Popular culture, of which fashion is part, provides symbols which, first and foremost, signify one's affiliation with a group or community. In the context of the cultural interplay between the center and the periphery, popular culture is an important channel through which the periphery's inhabitants can feel closer to the metropolis. According to Hannerz, following metropolitan popular culture is ‘the simplest way’ to overcome a sense of remoteness from the center: ‘One can reach toward the charisma of the center at least as well through a greater investment in popular culture as through involvement with a more differentiated, less widely understood high culture’.³¹⁵ Since the eighteenth century, fashion has remained one of the most widespread and persistence forms of the European cultural influence in the world. In particular, throughout the nineteenth century, Paris was the acknowledged world’s center in regards to women’s fashion.³¹⁶ For instance, Kristin Hoganson discussed the symbolic value of Parisian fashion for self-identification of nineteenth-century American women: for them, ‘commitment to French fashion proved the modernity. [...] If women from around the world were looking to France for fashion, not to do so would mean being stuck in a provincial backwater, outside the major currents of the time’.³¹⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, the fashion press in France and abroad fostered ‘the vogue for all things Parisian’ and contributed to further mythologizing of the French capital as the city of fashion and sophisticated modernity.³¹⁸

In the Russian Empire, fashion as a symbol of modernity and belonging to the ‘metropolitan’ European culture had an especially strong socio-cultural connotation. This is

³¹⁵ Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1992), 241.

³¹⁶ See Best, *The History of Fashion Press*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

³¹⁷ Kristin Hoganson, ‘The Fashionable World: Imagined Communities of Dress,’ in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 260-87.

³¹⁸ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, p. 50.

related to the historical role which clothes played in the Westernization of Russia. In 1701, Russian tsar Peter the Great obliged Russian nobility and the court to abandon their traditional costumes in favour of the modern European dress, thus signifying the country's political course towards the 'civilized and enlightened West'. Since then, following European fashion has been traditionally seen in Russia as one way to overcome the country's geographical and cultural remoteness from the West.³¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, the St. Petersburg fashion press became the major channel through which 'metropolitan' European fashion and fashion-related discussions reached Russians. As Ruane observed, 'the need to provide timely information on the latest styles and excesses became the *raison d'être* for the Russian fashion press'.³²⁰ In the course of the century, the audience for this type of periodical press was constantly growing and broadening, thus allowing ever wider social circles to feel affiliated to Western culture by following its sartorial code.

St. Petersburg was the Empire's ultimate fashion capital, where all fashion magazines were produced and later spread across the Empire. In this respect, St. Petersburg was not only a 'periphery' in relation to Paris; it was also a regional center, or metropolis for Russian provinces. This geo-cultural disposition further specified the role of the Petersburg fashion press. According to Hannerz, the role of such regional centers consists in refracting influences coming from first-rank international centers in line with local conditions and transmitting them further across its own peripheries. In this respect, creative adaptation of metropolitan cultural patterns to local 'social structures, to situations and emerging audiences' may result in the 'innovative acts of cultural brokerage'.³²¹ In this context, Petersburg fashion journalists were local cultural brokers, or mediatators, in regards to the foreign – primarily Parisian as long as women's fashion was concerned – fashion discourse, which they adapted to the regional cultural specificities. I distinguish between intermediation, or passive transmission, and mediation, which implies reconciliation and the opening of the potential for creative contribution, with a focus on the latter.

In the history of the pre-revolutionary Russian fashion press, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's editorship of *Modnyi magazin* was arguably one of the most prominent examples of mediation among Paris, Petersburg, and the Russian provinces. This becomes evident from her perceived mission as a Russian fashion editor and publisher: '*Modnyi magazin* has set for itself a task: to be a medium of fashion', by which she meant informing her readers of the latest Parisian trends and

³¹⁹ For a detailed discussion on this, see Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009).

³²⁰ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 94.

³²¹ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 242.

advising them on how to follow them in Petersburg as well as in the periphery.³²² Furthermore, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's creative mediation should also be seen in regards to shaping Russian gender norms. While the Russian fashion press in general, and *Modnyi magazin* in particular necessarily relied on European magazines for information on sartorial news, they also adopted its gendered discourse.³²³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fashion journalism presents a case in point for the study of how contemporary European gendered fashion discourse was, on the one hand, introduced to Russians and, on the other, recontextualized and transformed into an idiosyncratic local rhetoric. In the introduction to this dissertation, I mentioned that the adaptation of Western gendered norms presented Russian women with opportunities to broaden the spectrum of their traditional roles and representations. By analyzing *Modnyi magazin*'s fashion rhetoric, I aim, in particular, to discuss the editor's attempts to negotiate Russian women's roles through creative assimilation, or interpretation of foreign socio-cultural forms.

To uncover these creative contributions of Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fashion writing, I find it particularly useful to refer to the notion of fashion commentary, or fashion critique, which has recently been brought up by several scholars who advocate for its belated legitimization as a form of cultural critique.³²⁴ In a strict and narrow ('internal') sense, fashion critique is related to the evaluation of aesthetic values of fashion styles. A broader ('external') understanding of fashion critique implies going beyond fashion trends and analysing fashion as an expression of *Zeitgeist* and the changes taking place in wider society.³²⁵ In both senses, fashion critique involves critical judgement and evaluation and thus requires a hierarchical system of standards, values, and representations as a point of reference. In this regard, Van de Peer considers a notion of 'distance', or independence, as the primary condition that allows fashion journalism to develop 'the elucidative and evaluative framework we may expect any type of cultural criticism to establish'.³²⁶ I suggest that Russia's 'remoteness' (geographical, cultural, linguistic) from 'metropolitan' Paris arguably constituted the potentiality (opportunity as well as incentive) for Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei to develop an idiosyncratic critical standpoint and a rhetoric within her fashion writing. In the context of the Russians' sense of (perceived) cultural peripherality, it was exactly the social

³²² 'Об издании «Модного магазина» в 1870 году' [On publishing of *Modnyi magazin* in 1970], *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 390. [«Модный магазин» предположил себе задачей: быть проводником моды].

³²³ For more on the Russian fashion press, see Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 87-115.

³²⁴ See Sanda Miller, and McNeil, Peter. *Fashion Journalism: History, Theory, and Practice* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018); Best, *History of Fashion Press*; Francesca Granata, 'On Fashion Criticism'. *Fashion Projects*, no. 4 (2014): 1-6; Choi Kyung-Hee and Lewis Van Dyk, 'An Inclusive System for Fashion Criticism', in *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education* (2017): 12-21.

³²⁵ See Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marion, *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*. London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2016; Monica Tilton, 'Fashion criticism unraveled: A sociological critique of criticism in fashion media,' in *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 209-223.

³²⁶ Aurelie Van de Peer, 'Journalistic Fashion Criticism Then and Now', in *Address* 2 (2013): 52.

demand for the Western *Zeitgeist*, an attempt to grasp the modernity itself behind the materiality of fashion garments, that constituted the very *raison d'être* of the Russian fashion press in general, and *Modnyi magazin* in particular.³²⁷ At the same time, 'remoteness' from the metropolis provided the Russian editor with a sense of perspective in regards to foreign socio-cultural forms (e.g., gendered discourses), while also giving her freedom to critically and creatively re-interpret them in local terms – in line with her overall editorial and personal standpoint.

³²⁷ See Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 87-115.

Chapter 3: ‘Your one and only source’: Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s fashion reporting as cultural mediation

In this chapter, I study how Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei performed the primary function of a peripheral intellectual: mediating the metropolitan information flow to the ‘peripheral’ Russian Empire and refracting it in line with what was relevant for her audience. For this, I analyse her approach to fashion reporting in two steps: first, the sources that she used for her fashion editorials and, second, her audience-aware gate-keeping in regards to the information flow.

3.1 Bridging the metropolitan and the local: sources and fashion scenes

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei positioned her magazine as an exclusive local source of Parisian fashion illustrations. This section will particularly focus on how Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s fashion editorials informed her Russian audience about Parisian fashion news and, most importantly, presented such news through the lens of the local context. Claiming to be a medium of fashion, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei promised her readers to ‘immediately share’ and ‘transmit, very much in detail’ to her female readers all the ‘firm rumours’ concerning upcoming styles and novelties, as soon as she herself heard about them.³²⁸ She maintained that ‘in order to know the last word of fashion and be sure about what will remain in use, one should draw information from major sources’.³²⁹ Accordingly, in her fashion reports Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei asserted that her expertise was based on her access to these ‘major’, or primary, sources of information, both foreign and local.

On the one hand, the editor positioned her journal as an authoritative and reliable local source of European fashion news. The primary source which the Russian editor used for identifying international fashion trends was the specialized European press, from which she systematically took information concerning particular novelties as well as general tendencies. She argued that ‘subscribing to all the fashion magazines published in Europe, we [the editorial staff] extract from them what is most remarkable in regards to beauty and practicality’.³³⁰ Allegedly following the foreign fashion press, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei contended that, ‘To not know what is worn

³²⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 149. [передать все это, очень подробно]; Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 76. [верные слухи].

³²⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 275. [чтобы знать последнее слово моды и убедиться в том, что останется в употреблении, надо черпать сведения из главных источников].

³³⁰ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 300. [Выписывая все, издающиеся в Европе модные журналы, мы извлекаем из них для своего издания все, что находим самого замечательного по красоте и практичности].

– we cannot, because we subscribe to all the fashion magazines published abroad’.³³¹ She thus presented her fashion editorials as summarizing reviews of the main trends, or ‘the general features, on which all [foreign] fashion magazines agree’.³³² Although the editor claimed to read all European fashion magazines, she nonetheless clearly considered the specialized Parisian press the primary source for all other fashion reporters across Europe. She frequently referred to ‘Parisian fashion magazines’ or the ‘Parisian fashion press’, as well as ‘competent journals’,³³³ but rarely mentioned their titles. As was discussed in the first chapter, the visual material (fashion plates and patterns) was taken from several well-known French magazines; at different times, among them were *Les Modes parisiennes*, *Le Moniteur de la mode*, *La Mode illustrée*, *Le Moniteur des dames*, and *La Revue de la mode* (see Chapter 2.2). Supposedly these magazines were also among the main sources for her reports. However, the editor never directly referred to any particular magazine in her column. Instead she stressed that the information was taken from multiple sources and passed on to readers as summaries. The only exception was *Le Moniteur de la mode*, which Rekhnevskaja-Mei mentioned and quoted a few times. Most probably, she considered the international prestige of this expensive upmarket magazine to be so high and unquestionable that referring to it did not undermine her own editorial voice. At any rate, by presenting Parisian magazines as her main source of information, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei acknowledged the international French supremacy in the domain of fashion and fulfilled the role of a medium in regards to transmitting the world’s news to her audience.

On the other hand, despite this critical dependency on French magazines, the editor positioned *Modnyi magazin* as an independent Russian publication, reflecting local context and including local news. She advocated for the development of Russia’s own platform where foreign influences would be interpreted in regards to the local context:

Although French fashions are accepted everywhere in the civilized world, in every country they are modified and complemented, depending on climate and social conditions; therefore French magazines can serve only as a guide, while every nation needs its own journal, serving as a medium of the native element.³³⁴

³³¹ ‘Отвѣты редакціи’ [Responses of the editorial board], *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 280. [Не знать того, что носят – мы не можем, потому что выписываем все, издающиеся за границей, модные журналы].

³³² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 75. [общие черты, в которых согласны все модные журналы].

³³³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 264. [компетентные журналы].

³³⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 10-11. [Французские моды хотя и приняты во всем образованном мире, но в каждой стране они изменяются и пополняются, судя по климатическим и общественным условиям, так что французские журналы могут служить только пособием, но для каждого народа нужен свой собственный журнал, служащий проводником родному элементу].

Apart from indicating Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's attempt to establish the niche for her magazine, this quote also points to her sense of a mission in regards to focusing on her own culture and society, while considering them within the international context. In line with her claim, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei presented *Modnyi magazin* not as a passive intermediary of foreign content but as an independent Russian fashion publication with its own voice and agenda, determined by the needs of its local audience. She thus argued that 'the editorial staff of *Modnyi magazin*' reviewed all the Western fashion novelties and selected the fashion styles 'at its own discretion, in accordance with the fashion accepted by St. Petersburg high society and the conditions of Russian life'.³³⁵

In 1864, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei claimed: 'Female readers of *Modnyi magazin* can see [...] that fashion styles, delivered by our magazine, are taken from good sources, that these are – the *real* fashions'.³³⁶ With the 'realness' of fashion styles delivered by *Modnyi magazin*, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei meant that they reflected major trends: not marginal or unverified ('imaginary') but those 'accepted by distinguished society and destined for a long existence'.³³⁷ Furthermore, in line with positioning *Modnyi magazin* as a distinctly Russian magazine, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei frequently specified this presentation and claimed that in her fashion chronicles she focused on 'what is accepted in *our* society and what is destined *in Russia* [у нас] to a more or less long existence'.³³⁸ The emphasis on a Russian focus became particularly strong in the late 1860s and the 1870s, when competition with other magazines was becoming ever fiercer. In contrast to the 'intermediary' approach of her competitors, *Novyi Russkii bazar* and *Modnyi svet*, who claimed to merely reprint and translate information from German sources (*Der Bazar* and *Die Modenwelt* respectively), Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei stressed that her fashion authority was based on her varied sources and expert ability to locally filter the incoming flow of foreign fashion novelties. The editor claimed that the added value of her magazine consisted in being a comprehensive reference point concerning fashion-related developments in both Europe and Russia: 'we can safely say that those receiving *Modnyi magazin* have in their hands the best samples (*la crème*) of all the fashion magazines existing in the world as well as all Petersburg

³³⁵ 'Библиографическое объявление' [Bibliographical announcement], *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 16. [по своему усмотрению, сообразно с модами, принятыми высшим петербургским обществом и условиями русской жизни].

³³⁶ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 10. [Читательницы «Модного магазина» могли убедиться, из двухлетнего опыта, что моды, доставляемые им нашим журналом, почерпаются из хороших источников, что это – *настоящие* моды].

³³⁷ Ibid. [принимаются избранным обществом и которым суждено долгое существование].

³³⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 10. [то, что принимается в *нашем* обществе, и чему суждено у нас более или менее долгое существование].

news generated in response to the requirements of climate and native conditions'.³³⁹ For this, as discussed below, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei complemented 'metropolitan' news with the local information, which could not be found in any foreign journal. Such information was collected personally by Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei from various sources available to her.

Combining foreign and local sources

One way that Rekhnevskaja-Mei managed to stay well-informed regarding fashion novelties in both Paris and Petersburg was her personal and business connections with insiders in the fashion industry. It was thanks to 'following the fashions of a good society and receiving models from the first Parisian and Petersburg stores'³⁴⁰ that Rekhnevskaja-Mei was among the first to learn the most recent fashion news. Thanks to agreements with the biggest department stores in both countries, she regularly acquired the latest patterns directly from them and thus was able to form her own expert opinion about the current 'direction of fashion', which she then shared with her readers. Among other fashion insiders, whom provided Rekhnevskaja-Mei with news were individual dressmakers in Petersburg and Paris. Some of them were personally visited by Rekhnevskaja-Mei during her trips to Paris; she heard about the creation of others from Russian dressmakers who went to France to collect ideas for upcoming seasons.³⁴¹ Interestingly enough, sometimes Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei mediated directly between audience requests and insiders of the fashion industry; for instance:

In order to discover, at the request of our female readers, the latest trends for masquerades, we addressed the best dressmakers and known fashionistas to find out from them what is considered, at this current minute, the most elegant in this category.³⁴²

In addition to these sources, Rekhnevskaja-Mei commonly complemented her fashion reports with descriptions of outfits or styles which she herself noticed and considered 'worth mentioning'.³⁴³ She regularly discussed fashionable dresses which she saw on the streets and at

³³⁹ 'On publishing of *Modnyi magazin* in 1970', *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 390. [можем смело сказать, что получающие «Модный магазин» имеют в руках лучшие образцы (la crème) всех существующих в мире модных журналов и всех петербургских новостей, изобретаемых вследствие требований климата и родных условий] ().

³⁴⁰ Ibid. [следа за модами хорошего общества и получая модели из первых парижских и петербургских магазинов].

³⁴¹ For instance, in 1871 Rekhnevskaja-Mei told her readers: 'Petersburg *modistes* [модистки] went to Paris for the spring fashion; all of which will be remarkable, as our female readers will find out immediately'. Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 67. [Петербургские модистки полетели в Париж за весенними модами; все что будет замечательного, читательницы наши узнают немедленно].

³⁴² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 485. [Чтобы узнать, по запросу читательниц, последние тренды для маскарадов, «мы адресовались к лучшим нашим модисткам и к записным шеголихам, чтобы узнать от них, что считается, в настоящую минуту, самым элегантным в этом роде].

³⁴³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 107. [достойны замечания].

social gatherings in St. Petersburg and abroad. For example, talking about the splendid outfits of society ladies in St. Petersburg, she described, on behalf of the editorial board, ‘a few toilettes which we particularly liked’.³⁴⁴ Similarly, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei discussed what was worn by French society ladies whom she saw in Europe – most commonly in Paris. As recounted by *Russkaia starina*, during her second marriage, Sofia Grigorievna spent several months per year abroad, first and foremost in Paris.³⁴⁵ In addition, as Anna Polianskaia has indicated, during her trips to Paris her sister regularly met there with the St. Petersburg high society ladies, who introduced her to the Parisian high society life. As a result, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei would tell her readers: ‘let us list the most brilliant outfits, noticed by us at one of the most brilliant Parisian balls. Here we see fashionable colours and fashionable cuts, and hear the last word of fashion’.³⁴⁶ After having married Rekhnevskaiia, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei also regularly went to fashionable European spa resorts, and her fashion chronicles are full of stories about what fashion styles women wore there. For instance, in 1864 she told her readers:

Fashion has left Paris and, it seems, for a long time; it now reigns at countryside villas, on the seacoasts, in Baden-Baden, Vichy -- generally in all the places where the top aristocracy has moved. It [fashion] is especially prominent at summer balls, where we managed to notice new, delightful toilettes, which we hasten to inform our readers about.³⁴⁷

Therefore, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s fashion reports can be seen as a platform that brought together many sources of various natures and origins, foreign as well as Russian. These sources were European –especially, first and foremost, French – fashion magazines, celebrated department stores and individual dress-makers in both Paris and Petersburg, European and Russian high society and its women trend-setters, and the editor’s own observations, which she collected in Petersburg and during her stays in Paris and at European spa resorts. All of those were of relevance for her audience, and the majority of her readers could only acquire this information

³⁴⁴ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 78. [некоторые туалеты, которые нам особенно понравились].

³⁴⁵ ‘Материалы к биографии Софьи Григорьевны Рехневской-Мей’ [Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei], f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House).

³⁴⁶ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1868, 56. [начнем с верхних регионов и перечисли самые блистательные туалеты, замеченные нами на одном из самых блистательных парижских балов. Тут мы увидим и модные цвета, и модные покрои, услышим последнее слово моды].

³⁴⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 265. [Мода покинула Париж и, кажется, надолго; она царствует в окрестных виллах, у морских берегов, в Баден-Бадене, Виши, вообще во всех местах, куда переселился цвет аристократии. Она особенно отличается на летних балах, где нам удалось заметить новые, восхитительные туалеты, которые мы спешим сообщить нашим читательницам].

from the magazine, which regularly informed them on ‘the main features of the upcoming fashions’.³⁴⁸

Parisian and Petersburg fashion scenes

When speaking about fashion, Rekhnevskaja-Mei spoke simultaneously about France and Russia, juxtaposed the Parisian and Petersburg fashion scenes, and, furthermore, presented them as interconnected. Her reviews commonly began with short descriptions of the general atmosphere in both capitals: weather, social calendars, novelties in the biggest department stores, and outfits worn by women on the streets and at social events. She thus described Parisian fashion within its socio-cultural entourage of the French high society, which attributed to any dress or way of wearing it a dream-like allure of attractiveness:

Everywhere where the Parisian fashionable world displays itself in all its splendor and elegance – at an art exhibition, at horse races, at concerts of the *Champs-Élysées* – one can only see tunics with flat panniers, short skirts, hats *glaneuses* and red.³⁴⁹

At the same time, the Petersburg fashion scene was depicted as equally magnificent: ‘High society is partying, dancing mornings and evenings; the outfits are splendid. It would be difficult to list even the most remarkable among the outfits of the female representatives of our fashion [нашего фешона]’.³⁵⁰

As seen in the last quotes, in composing her chronicles, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei referred to the high society and its women representatives. In this category she included both French ‘women trendsetters [...] shining, one in front of another, with their infallible outfits’³⁵¹ and trendy Russians: ‘fashion stars’, ‘Petersburg fashionistas’, and ‘our worldly women of fashion’.³⁵² The editor frequently supplemented her discussions of what was worn by French society ladies of the highest ranks with information on Russian fashionistas. For instance, describing ‘a splendid

³⁴⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 107. [главные черты будущей моды уже известны].

³⁴⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1880, 166. [Везде, где парижский модный свет показывается во всем блеске и элегантности, на художественной выставке, на скачках, в концертах Елисейских полей, только и видно что корсажи с мысами, тюники с плоскими панье, короткие юбки, шляпы *glaneuses* и красное, красное].

³⁵⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 78. [В большом свете веселятся, танцуют утром и вечером; туалеты великолепны. Трудно было бы даже перечислить даже и самые замечательные из нарядов представительниц нашего фешона: однако мы опишем некоторые туалеты, которые нам особенно понравились].

³⁵¹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 184. [Теперь все законодательницы моды находятся на водах и на морских купаньях, где блистают, одна перед другой, непогрешимыми туалетами. Туда отправляются им из Парижа все новые изобретения модисток].

³⁵² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 79. [наши светские щеголихи].

masquerade, which took place in 'Tuileries', she described, based on reports in the French press, what was worn by the most prominent among the French court ladies.³⁵³ Simultaneously, within the same story, Rekhnevskaja-Mei mentioned several Russian aristocratic women who attended the ball, discussing their outfits and roles in the event. Elsewhere she described the outfits of '[o]ur female compatriot, countess Morny, one of the shining stars of the French court'.³⁵⁴



Modnyi magazin, 1872, no. 1. A fashion editorial and black-and-white in-text fashion gravures

The editor also proudly informed her readers when the French press presented Russian noblewomen as trendsetters. For example, Rekhnevskaja-Mei mentioned that the dowry of the Russian princess Maria Maximilianovna 'caused a great sensation in fashionable Paris' and was discussed in French magazines as one 'of the most remarkable among recent news'.³⁵⁵ Similarly, she reported that 'all the magazines are talking about the toilette of princess S-va'³⁵⁶ and presented her as a Russian 'fashion star' who was said to have looked especially radiant at an evening which she organized in Nice. On a more general level, the Russian editor frequently described attitudes and manners and claimed they were similar in both capitals; she wrote, for instance: 'in the highest

³⁵³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 36. [блестательный маскарад, бывший в Тюильри].

³⁵⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 136. [Соотечественница наша, гр. Морни, одна из блестящих звезд французского двора].

³⁵⁵ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 39. [произвело в модном Париже сильное ощущение]; Ibid. [французские журналы сообщают о нем, как об одной из самых замечательных новостей последнего времени.]

³⁵⁶ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 67. [Все журналы говорят о туалете княгини С-вой].

Parisian and Petersburg society young girls are dressed extremely simply, no matter how big their parents' fortune'.³⁵⁷ These are just a few examples of how, within Rekhnevskaja-Mei's fashion columns, the Parisian and Petersburg fashion scenes and their actors were presented as parts of the same cosmopolitan fashionable community.

Moreover, through her editorials, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei aimed to bridge the gap between the Parisian and Petersburg fashion scenes by presenting the latter in relation to the former. For instance, this found expression in the juxtaposition of climatic differences: 'our climate conditions do not completely coincide with the Parisian ones, at least a few months per year. [...] But if the outerwear of Parisians does not work for us, their home dresses are just right'.³⁵⁸ Another example could be Rekhnevskaja-Mei's presentation of a famous store, about which she spoke frequently: 'the Delille department store is one of the most significant in France and enjoys European popularity. It has existed in Petersburg for eighteen years already'.³⁵⁹ Overall, by presenting the Parisian and Petersburg fashion scenes and actors as interconnected, Rekhnevskaja-Mei was bringing the remote world of metropolitan French fashion closer to the familiar socio-cultural context of her readers' own country.

Discussing Russian contribution

Even more importantly, in her fashion reports, the editor often discussed the creative potential of her native culture. On the one hand, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei presented French people as the ultimate *creators* of fashion. This becomes particularly evident in 1871, when Rekhnevskaja-Mei discussed the impact of the Franco-Prussian war on international fashion. The five-month long occupation of Paris was depicted as a dead season in fashion, when nothing substantially new was created. Nonetheless, Rekhnevskaja-Mei argued that, despite the devastating war, Parisians 'did not renounce their powerful initiative in regards to taste and ability to dress'³⁶⁰ and continued to dictate fashion from Versailles, where the French high society moved, following its government: 'there one sees the best toilettes – it is the place where fashion writes its laws'.³⁶¹ In line with this

³⁵⁷ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 68. [В высшем парижском и петербургском обществе молоденькие девушки одеваются чрезвычайно просто, как бы ни было велико состояние их родителей].

³⁵⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 68. [Наши климатические условия не совсем совпадают с парижскими, по крайней мере несколько месяцев в году. [...] Но если уличная одежда французов нам не пригодна, из домашний наряд – совсем по нас].

³⁵⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 21. [торговый дом Делиля – один из самых значительных во Франции и пользуется европейской популярностью. В Петербурге он существует уже около 18 лет].

³⁶⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 82. [не отреклись от своей могущественной инициативы в деле вкуса и умения одеваться].

³⁶¹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 162. [там видны лучшие туалеты – оттуда шлет мода свои законы].

depiction of Paris as the world's fashion metropolis, or 'the seat of creativity', in Shils' terms, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei associated the entire 'direction' of international fashion with France's internal socio-political and cultural life: 'there is no doubt that if there was a change of government in France, a radical change in clothes would follow', she posited.³⁶²

On the other hand, though France was presented as the ultimate source of fashion news, trends and attitudes, the editor celebrated the moments when Russian culture served as a source of inspiration for metropolitan trendsetters: 'in Paris there are Russian frosts, and the Russian fashion styles are considered the most chic: coats are not only covered with fur, but, as in the old days, are simply made of fur; their names are: *Boyard, Moscovite, Czarine*'.³⁶³ Elsewhere, Rekhnevskaja-Mei described how elements of the traditional Russian dress was introduced in Parisian fashion 'as an imitation of Russian style'.³⁶⁴ She mentioned that French dressmakers were very fond of this idea and often said: 'C'est tout à fait l'esprit du costume russe' [This is totally the spirit of Russian dress]. She summed up that, 'overall, the Russian *genre* [style] is extremely liked' and 'is very much preferred'.³⁶⁵ Most overtly, Rekhnevskaja-Mei's emphasis on the metropolitan acknowledgement of Russians as members of the fashionable club was expressed in 1866. Following the wedding ceremony of the Russian royal heir Alexander Alexandrovich to the Danish Princess Dagmar, the editor discussed how foreigners who came to St. Petersburg for this occasion were impressed and amazed with the 'splendour and brilliance of the festivities' and then continued:

Without even touching the politics (God forbid!) and remaining within the microscopic circle of our specialization, we cannot help to observe that, recently, foreigners have been treating Russia differently than before. When have the French borrowed *fashions* [моды] from us? And now there are *Russian* shirts, *Russian* belts; they dress their boys in *Russian kaftans*; finally today we read, in one of the Parisian magazines which we have received, a few lines that have flattered our national pride. Here is what the trendsetters write.³⁶⁶

³⁶² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 294. [Нет сомнения, что если бы переменялось во Франции правительство, то последовала бы радикальная перемена в одеждах].

³⁶³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 383. [В Париже стоят русские холода, и поэтому самый шик составляют русские моды: шубки не только опушают мехом, но как в былое время, но просто делают их на меху; название им: *Boyard, Moscovite, Czarine*].

³⁶⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 301. [В подражание русским].

³⁶⁵ Ibid. [Вообще русский *genre* необыкновенно нравится [...] пользуются большим предпочтением].

³⁶⁶ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 362. [Не касаясь нисколько политика (Боже сохрани!) и вращаясь только в микроскопическом кружке своей специальности, мы не можем не сделать замечания, что с некоторых пор иностранцы относятся к России не по-прежнему. Когда это бывало, чтобы французы заимствовали у нас *моды*? А нынче у них появились русские рубашки, русские пояса; мальчиков своих они одевают в *русские кафтаны*; наконец сегодня мы прочли в одном из полученных парижских журналов несколько строк, польстившей нашей национальной гордости. Вот что пишут законодатели моды].

This is followed by a quote from a Parisian fashion magazine which praised Russian-style coats and presented them as elegance *à la russe* and ‘clothing of the best taste’.³⁶⁷ In the same way, the editor noted how Russian pastimes inspired international fashionable trends: ‘Petersburg was the first to give an example of skating, and this hygienic and highly graceful exercise became fashionable in the whole of Europe; the fashionable world gladly took part in it and outfits designed specifically for skating appeared’.³⁶⁸ In addition, Rekhnevskaja-Mei presented Russian women as having refined taste which made them stand out among their counterparts from other countries. For instance, discussing a trend on dyeing hair, she assessed this as an *eccentricity*, writing: ‘Let’s leave these strange fantasies to female foreigners and try to display our graceful taste: until now, we managed to do so’.³⁶⁹

Apart from demonstrating how Russians were acknowledged by Europeans as members of the international fashionable community, Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s fashion reports were also remarkable in regards to how the editor encouraged her compatriots to cherish their own native heritage:

Currently, fashion is borrowing samples from everywhere. We, Russians should be drawing from the native source. We have some delightful outfits, which, of course, require interpretation; but to us it seems possible to reconcile them with modern requirements, while entirely preserving their folk or ethnic character.³⁷⁰

Following this statement, the editor expressed her editorial intention to regularly include in *Modnyi magazin* the patterns and illustrations of national dress from different regions of the Russian Empire. Interestingly enough, this idea must have been the outcome of her interaction with the one of the most prominent Russian Slavophiles Ivan Aksakov. The archival source mentioned that in the first years that *Modnyi magazin* was published, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei followed the ‘general inclination towards Slavophilism’ and had an idea to ‘introduce Russian costumes to fashion. But,

³⁶⁷ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 383. [одеждой самого хорошего вкуса].

³⁶⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 2. [Петербург первый подал пример катанью на коньках, и это гигиеническое и в высшей степени грациозное упражнение вошло в моду во всей Европе; модный свет принял в нем живое участие и появились прелестные костюмы, предназначенные специально для катанья на коньках].

³⁶⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 267. [предоставим эти странные фантазии иностранкам и постараемся блеснуть изящным вкусом: до сих пор это нам удавалось].

³⁷⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 233. [Теперь настало такое время, когда мода заимствует образцы отовсюду. Нам, русским, всего лучше черпать из родного источника. У нас есть прелестные наряды, которые разумеется требуют обработки; но нам кажется возможным помирить их с современными требованиями, сохраняя весь их народный характер].

not knowing how to approach this, [she] decided to ask for advice from Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov'.³⁷¹

Furthermore, Rekhnevskaja-Mei regularly expressed her support for the local fashion scene by describing what was prominent among its creations and services. In almost every report, Rekhnevskaja-Mei mentioned a local dressmaker, store, or atelier that could help her subscribers follow Parisian fashion. In this regard, by referring to the European authority, which determined that anything Western in Russia was generally seen as of quality and modernity, Rekhnevskaja-Mei promoted the national fashion industry and craftspeople. For example, she said about *Antonov's Store* [Магазин Антонова]: 'we are pleased to follow the success and expansion of the activities of this *Russian trading house*, which is totally following in European footsteps [...]. Everything is made after the best Parisian models'.³⁷²

3.2 Gate-keeping approach to fashion reporting: Parisian fashion and Russian audience

Rekhnevskaja-Mei promised her readers to be their 'guide and advisor [...]' in one of the most vital necessities of life – clothing'.³⁷³ The editor's perceived task was not only to inform her readers of the news, but also to pre-select those styles which were most appropriate for them. This was particularly important in the context of the growing diversity of fashion tendencies related to advances in production technology, the emergence of affordable ready-to-wear clothing, and the rise of individualism, on the one hand, and new social classes, on the other.³⁷⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei claimed that *Modnyi magazin's* editorial staff (or herself) were 'trustworthy and equipped with infallible information on its subject' and, thus, able to advise women about which fashion choices they should make when faced with an abundance of novelties and styles.³⁷⁵ This found its expression in the editorial attempt to tailor her reports to the demands and needs of her specific audience: Russian women of varied socio-economic standing.

³⁷¹ 'Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaja-Mei', f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222, Institute of Russian Literature. [ввести в моду русские костюмы. Но, не зная как взяться за это дело, она решилась обратиться за советом к Ивану Сергеевичу Аксакову].

³⁷² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 287. [мы с удовольствием следим за успехами и расширением деятельности этого *русского торгового дома*, поставившего себя совершенно на европейскую ногу ... все сделано по лучшим парижским моделям].

³⁷³ 'On publishing of *Modnyi magazin* in 1970', *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 390. [быть руководителем и советником женщины в одной из необходимейших жизненных потребностей – в одежде].

³⁷⁴ See Christine Delhaye, The Development of Consumption Culture and the Individualization of Female Identity: Fashion Discourse in the Netherlands 1880-1920, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 6.1 (2006), 87-115; Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Richard Bienvenu (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁷⁵ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 10. [заслуживающим доверие и снабженным непогрешимыми сведениями по своему предмету].

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei assured her readers of her 'sincere wish to meet the hopes of [her] female subscribers and benefit them substantially'.³⁷⁶ In her very first fashion report, she mentioned: 'demands can be outstandingly varied. [...] The editorial staff should satisfy everyone'.³⁷⁷ As becomes evident from Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's responses to her subscribers, she received very conflicting requests indeed: some asked for more of the latest Parisian novelties, while others complained that many of the dresses described in *Modnyi magazin* were 'too luxurious [...] hence unaffordable for the majority'.³⁷⁸ As the magazine targeted women of different social classes living across the vast Russian Empire, the diversity of its readership was of socio-economic as well as geographical, with each group having its own needs and limitations in regards to fashion. First, *Modnyi magazin*, similar to its predecessors, continued to cater to the interests of 'rich and socially high-standing women', worldly Russian aristocrats of the St. Petersburg high society.³⁷⁹ Women of this group needed the latest, most fashionable and luxurious styles coming from Paris: 'among other female subscribers, there are wealthy persons of high ranking, who require particularly sumptuous outfits'.³⁸⁰ Second, the editor emphasized that her goal was to include women beyond this narrow social circle into the magazine's readership. Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei promised to acknowledge the circumstances of women 'of modest means': 'our primary attention is mostly focused on what is accessible for everyone'.³⁸¹ In addition, those subscribers who lived in cities and towns remote from Petersburg, regardless of their financial circumstances and social standing, were interested in the news from both French and Russian capitals, which allowed them to keep up with metropolitan fashion. Furthermore, living in the periphery, they commonly faced difficulties in access to stores, dress-makers, and the materials needed to follow the latest fashion styles.

In an attempt to acknowledge the needs of each of these categories and to find common ground between their varied expectations, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei promised to not only keep her readers properly informed of all fashion news in both capitals, but also to pre-select and emphasize those tendencies which would enable *all* of her female readers to follow fashion regardless of their

³⁷⁶ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 194. [искреннее желание оправдать надежды моих подписчиц и доставить им существенную пользу].

³⁷⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 19. [требования бывают необыкновенно различны. [...] Редакция должна всех удовлетворить].

³⁷⁸ 'On publishing of *Modnyi magazin* in 1970', *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 390.

³⁷⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 62. [богатых и высокопоставленных в обществе женщин].

³⁸⁰ 'Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 354. [в числе подписчиц есть лица достаточные, высокопоставленные, которым нужны именно великолепные туалеты].

³⁸¹ 'Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 349. [Мы обязаны давать отчет обо всем, что принято модой, и часто описываем туалеты самого большого света; но главное наше внимание обращено на то, что более доступно каждому].

limitations. Rekhnevskaiia-Mei frequently discussed what she called ‘its [*Modnyi magazin*’s] system’:³⁸²

providing a full report of splendid and capricious fashion creations and describing expensive outfits, affordable and necessary for rich and socially high-standing women, we never forget about the majority of our female subscribers, who wish to have *the necessary*, without spending on *the excessive*.³⁸³

Such repetitive explanations of the editorial standpoint in regards to fashion reporting shed light on the innovativeness of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s targeting policy, as well as her approach to fashion writing, which aimed at simultaneously addressing women from different social circles within the central column of the magazine.

The innovativeness of Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s dual editorial framework becomes particularly evident when juxtaposed with the major French magazines of the period. As Kate Nelson Best points out, from the 1850s the French fashion press became segmented in regards to target audience. The established upmarket fashion press of the first half of the century, in particular the luxurious *Le Moniteur de la Mode* (1843-1914), continued to ‘focus on the society elite, especially the court at Compiègne’, aiming to preserve the socio-cultural superiority of the aristocracy.³⁸⁴ At the same time, new cheaper fashion magazines started to emerge that reflected the interests of the middle class. They identified their target audience simply as ‘women’ (in contrast to society ladies) and put practical and economical dressmaking at the center of its program.³⁸⁵ The pioneering French magazine of this new type was *La Mode illustrée* (1860-1913), edited by Emmeline Raymond. The importance of this magazine for the emergence of popular fashion press in Europe is often pointed out by scholars, for instance: ‘de cette publication date la transformation des journaux de mode’ [from this publication dates the transformation of fashion journals].³⁸⁶ Both *Le Moniteur de la mode* with its international prestige and the phenomenally successful *La Mode illustrée* were outstandingly influential in regards to shaping the format and rhetoric of the fashion press both in France and abroad. In this context, these two magazines could be seen as representative of the major trends in the European fashion press of the period.

³⁸² Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 530. [своя система].

³⁸³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 62. [Отдавая полный отчет в великолепных и прихотливых созданиях моды, и описывая дорогие туалеты, доступные и необходимые для богатых и высокопоставленных в обществе женщин, мы никогда не забываем о большинстве наших подписчиц, которые желают иметь *необходимое*, не позволяя себе *излишнего*.].

³⁸⁴ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 29.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 57.

³⁸⁶ Raymond Gaudriault, *La Gravure de Mode Feminine en France* (Paris: Editions des Amateurs, 1983), 79.

As I have already said, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei almost never directly referred to any of the foreign fashion magazines, from which she took information for her fashion reports. The only exception in this respect was *Le Moniteur de la mode*, which she quoted several times over the years, and which was probably related to the international prestige of this French magazine. In contrast, *La Mode illustrée*, as any other fashion magazine, was never mentioned in Rekhnevskaja-Mei's editorials. However, both *Le Moniteur de la mode* and *La Mode illustrée* served as the source of fashion illustrations for *Modnyi magazin* and, as the following will demonstrate, the editorial approach of the Russian magazine resembled that of both of these magazines. In order to decode it, I suggest seeing Rekhnevskaja-Mei's fashion reporting as consisting of two parallel strategies for presenting French fashion aimed at different segments of her audience.

Wealthy women of high rankings

The first strategy was to study fashion news from all available sources in order to identify trends which were approved by the established fashion community, consisting of fashion insiders and trendsetters, both in Paris and St. Petersburg. Then, a summarizing overview was presented with regards to the specificities of the Russian context (e.g., climate, social events' calendar, availability in Petersburg stores). This part was meant to address the common curiosity about the general direction of fashion, as well as to cater to the demands of those who could afford the most luxurious and trendy clothing. This was particularly relevant also for those of her wealthy readers who lived far from the capital and thus faced the lack of access to trendy metropolitan ateliers and department stores: 'such persons, who live in the province, receive the preliminary information through fashion magazines and, according to them, order their outfits from the capital'.³⁸⁷ Delivering on this promise, *Modnyi magazin* 'offer[ed] to its female readers only what [was] approved by the highest authorities in the matter of taste and decency'.³⁸⁸ The reference to the 'highest authorities' aimed to establish the magazine's upmarket self-positioning and standards, thus satisfying the needs of the most exigent and refined subscribers from the 'highest ranks' while passing their tastes to those of a more modest social standing.

In this respect, *Modnyi magazin*'s rhetoric resembled that of the upmarket *Moniteur de la mode*, which focused on the highest society, as the ultimate arbiters of fashion and aspirational role models.³⁸⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei thus presented herself as 'a guide for Russian women' from the

³⁸⁷ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 354. [такие лица, живущие в провинции, получают предварительные сведения через модные журналы и, соображаясь с ними, выписывают свои наряды из столицы].

³⁸⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 147. [предлагает своим читательницам лишь одобренное высшими авторитетами в деле вкуса и приличия].

³⁸⁹ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 45-73.

perspective of high society tastes and emphasized that in her reports she particularly focused on those ‘accepted by women with good taste’, which she meant as the highest society in France and in Russia.³⁹⁰ For example, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei maintained that the styles which she suggested were invariably ‘in accordance with the fashion accepted by the higher St. Petersburg society’.³⁹¹ In this way, the editor assured her readers that they would never be accused of making a fashionable *faux pas* if they followed her suggestions and chose the styles which she advised.

Women of modest means

The second strategy of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s audience-sensitive fashion gate-keeping was targeted particularly at the economy-aware segment of the readership, at

persons of the middle circle – they constitute the majority – willing to combine elegance with economy, and, after having spent money on a good, expensive dress, want to wear it for a possibly long time and be sure that they keep up with fashion.³⁹²

The concept of ‘real’ fashion, developed by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, implied not only the Parisian origin of styles and their acceptance by the Petersburg high society, but also their longevity, ‘as there [were] fashions which are ephemeral and transient: they, although accepted by the society, [were] rejected by the economy’.³⁹³ Furthermore, she promised her subscribers to pre-select from among the ‘more or less splendid outfits’³⁹⁴ of highest society described in the Parisian magazines primarily those which, according to economic considerations, were ‘most accessible and not too complex, and hence could be made at home’.³⁹⁵ In view of her provincial readers, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s professional expertise and knowledge of the local market served her in her efforts to preselect those fashionable models that could also be sewn by a provincial dressmaker and made from materials which could be found in remote areas. Therefore, without undermining the interests of the more wealthy segment of her audience, this selection criteria was elaborated by the editor specifically for those readers who wanted to make sure that they spent their limited budgets wisely.

³⁹⁰ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 57. [приняты женщинами с хорошим вкусом].

³⁹¹ ‘Библиографическое объявление’ [Bibliographical announcement], 1872, 16. [по своему усмотрению, сообразно с модами, принятыми высшим петербургским обществом и условиями русской жизни].

³⁹² Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 354. [лица среднего круга – таких большинство – желают соединить щегольство с экономией и, потратившись на хорошее, дорогое платье, хотят носить его возможно долгое время и быть уверенными, что они не отстали от моды.].

³⁹³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 10. [потому что есть моды эфемерные и скоропреходящие: их хоть и принимает свет, но отвергает экономия].

³⁹⁴ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 37. [более или менее великолепных туалетов].

³⁹⁵ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 37. [более всего доступно и не очень сложно, - что, словом, можно устроить дома].

In this regard, although Rekhnevskaja-Mei clearly prioritized the rhetoric and prestige of the upmarket French fashion press, her agenda also followed the example of the emerging middle-class one. To address the needs of the more modest segment of her target audience, she adopted *La Mode illustrée*'s imperative of a woman's dress combining 'economy and good taste'.³⁹⁶ In a similar manner, the Russian editor frequently argued that the 'main idea of [her] magazine consist[ed] in providing an opportunity to follow fashion without spending extra money on the toilette'.³⁹⁷ Most importantly, the economy-aware approach to fashion reporting was closely related to fashion patterns which *Modnyi magazin* provided so that women could bring them to dressmakers or, most importantly, use them for sewing their own outfits. It was *La Mode illustrée* that popularized this hands-on approach to fashion on the contemporary French and, as a result, European fashion press market.³⁹⁸

The dual, or hybrid nature of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's editorial strategy

As a result of these parallel strategies, the subscribers of *Modnyi magazin* could expect to receive well-thought out fashion reports, which carefully merged the latest world trends with their particular needs and expectations. Subscribing to 'all fashion magazines published in Europe', Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei indeed extracted from them what was relevant for her Russian audience. At the same time, the above-discussed duality of Rekhnevskaja-Mei's targeting policy suggests that her approach to fashion reporting reveals the dual, or hybrid nature of her entire editorial framework with regards to the segmented French fashion press' market. The major precondition for the editorial merging of the two alternative, or parallel, fashion press agendas was the small size of the fashion press local audience. The significant female readership of the French fashion press allowed for its segmentation in regards to more particular target groups. In contrast, in the mid-1860s, *Modnyi magazin*, as one of the few highly popular Russian fashion magazines, had a circulation of 6000 copies, and its main competitor, *Modnyi svet*, had 9000. At the same time, Russian society of the period, especially after the abolition of serfdom, was increasingly heterogeneous in socio-economic terms, both within the gentry and the middle classes.³⁹⁹ These combined factors shaped the emergence of *Modnyi magazin*, with targeting that could be called 'hybrid' in relation to that of the European fashion press, with its clearly segmented target audience. In this context, Rekhnevskaja-Mei's rhetoric avoided a clear specification of its readership in socio-economic and class terms but purposefully aimed at creating the editorial

³⁹⁶ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 58.

³⁹⁷ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 70. [заключается мысль нашего журнала: дать возможность следить за модой не тратя лишних денег на туалет].

³⁹⁸ See Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 43-55; Gaudriault, *Gravure de Mode*, 79-80.

³⁹⁹ See Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 85-156.

framework suitable for different women. Rekhnevskaja-Mei's major innovation was that she merged the latest fashion news from the most refined sources, demanded by her wealthy aristocratic readers, with providing a practical roadmap towards simplifying and reproducing them, necessary for women of more humble origin and modest means.

To sum up, this chapter has demonstrated that Rekhnevskaja-Mei's approach to fashion reporting was determined by two key factors: mediation among Paris, Petersburg, and Russian provinces and recognition of the varied needs of *Modnyi magazin*'s target audience. As a result, her fashion program brought together various sources and audiences, and, in this respect, in itself constituted an 'innovative act of cultural brokerage', speaking in Hannerz's terms.⁴⁰⁰ The very 'hybrid' format of *Modnyi magazin*'s resulted from the local adaptation of metropolitan cultural patterns to particular 'social structures, to situations and emerging audiences'.⁴⁰¹ In the next chapter, I analyse how Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's innovative format and hybrid targeting played out in her original discourse on femininity.

⁴⁰⁰ Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 242.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's Gendered Fashion Discourse

Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei frequently called her fashion column a 'chronicle', which highlights one of her major tasks as a fashion journalist: following and documenting fashion through time. Nevertheless, the editor often commented ironically on fashion's tireless pursuit of novelty and women's readiness to follow whatever is proclaimed 'fashionable'. In this regard, she confessed: 'we, due to our profession, are obliged to report on everything that is in fashion; but this does not mean that we ourselves like it all'.⁴⁰² Indeed, Rekhnevskaja-Mei often asserted that some Parisian fashion trends merited criticism rather than a following: 'Unfortunately, fashion is rarely driven by wisdom or even mere common sense; sometimes it – strange to say – goes completely against the sense of grace or any natural notion of beauty'.⁴⁰³ The editor went beyond her primary task as a fashion journalist – to report on fashion novelties and sartorial details – and elaborated a critical standpoint in regards to fashion and regularly addressed questions of aesthetics, taste, and distinction, and their roles in individual and collective identification and presentation.

4.1 Between upmarket elegance and middle-class economy

In the second half of the nineteenth century, segmentation of the French fashion press between upmarket and middle-class magazines entailed the shaping of alternative fashion-related discourses targeted at women from different social classes. For example, the notion of 'taste' evoked different connotations in upmarket and middle-class magazines: taste for the readers of *Le Moniteur de la mode* was defined in terms of refinement and sophistication, while the 'good taste' promoted by *La Mode illustrée* implied modesty and exemplary morality, as opposed to beautifying.⁴⁰⁴ Such varied interpretations point to the tensions between representations of femininity as they came to portray a 'fashion consumer and more domesticated views of women as economical home-makers', which constituted the nerve of the European fashion commentary in the second half of the century.⁴⁰⁵ These models were represented by the eroticized figure of an elegant *parisienne*, a fashionable Parisian woman on the side of the upmarket press and a domesticated image of an economical mother and housewife in middle-class magazines. In light

⁴⁰² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 529. [мы, по своей профессии, обязаны давать отчет обо всем, что в моде; однако это еще не значит, чтобы нам самим все это нравилось].

⁴⁰³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 207. [К несчастью, мода редко руководится мудростью или даже простым здравым смыслом; иногда же она – странно сказать – идет даже совершенно наперекор чувству изящного и всякому естественному понятию о красоте].

⁴⁰⁴ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 45-73.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 46; Breward, 'Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal,' *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 71-89.

of her hybrid targeting, which model on fashionable femininity did Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei shape and promote?

Upmarket discourse on fashion and femininity

Reflecting the emerging democratization of choice in European fashion discourse, throughout the 1860s and 1870s Rekhnevskaja-Mei consistently emphasized how the time of fashion's 'tyranny and arbitrariness' was over and contemporary fashion, in contrast, 'prescribed nothing and forbade nothing', thus allowing space for individual choice.⁴⁰⁶ In line with these developments, the editor granted her female readers ever broader personal responsibility for their individual looks and choices. She thus emphasized: 'There was a time when fashion was one for all [...]. Now this is not the case: now one should know how to choose among multiple models'.⁴⁰⁷ At the same time, the editor stressed that 'this very freedom constitute[d] a danger' as it increased the risk for a woman to 'fall into vulgarity and ridiculous extremes'.⁴⁰⁸ To prevent her readers from this peril, Rekhnevskaja-Mei contended that her role as a reporter consisted in 'following the choice of the highest fashionable community'.⁴⁰⁹

To this end, her rhetoric clearly followed the upmarket French fashion press. In particular, *Le Moniteur de la mode* transmitted the tastes of French court ladies. They were the first fashion leaders or 'celebrities' promoted by the fashion press and, as custodians of sartorial knowledge, embodied the way of dressing *comme il faut* [as it should be]. In an analogous way, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei put a strong emphasis on both the French and Russian courts and high nobility. She regularly reported on fashion choices of the French court-ladies. The most important of them was, of course, the French Empress Eugenie, the major European fashion icon and celebrity of the period: 'what is introduced by the Empress is accepted by the entire fashionable community',⁴¹⁰ contended the editor. Furthermore, similarly to the *Moniteur de la mode*, *Modnyi magazin* promoted aristocratic distinction, sophisticated simplicity and a 'same-but-different' approach as the key signs of fashionable femininity which:

⁴⁰⁶ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 329. [тирания и самоуправство]; Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 202. [ничто не предписывается и не запрещается модою].

⁴⁰⁷ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 351. [Было время, когда мода была одна для всех [...]. Теперь не то: теперь надо уметь выбрать из множества моделей].

⁴⁰⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 68. [сама эта свобода представляет собой опасность]; Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 362. [впасть в вульгарность и смешные крайности].

⁴⁰⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 187. [роль модной хроники должна ограничиваться только перечислением известных предметов, руководствуясь выбором высшего фешенебельного общества.. Поэтому, говоря, что какая-нибудь вещь в моде – мы подразумеваем, что она в большом употреблении у особ высшего круга].

⁴¹⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 266. [что введено императрицей – принимается всем фешенебельным обществом].

requires perfect simplicity – an outfit of a noble lady [знатная дама] should not differ sharply from the crowd: there is a difference, inimitable, elusive, inherent only to women of a good circle – it is taste, choice, and *something* so elegant, which will certainly express itself.⁴¹¹

According to *Modnyi magazin*, refined tastes of high society were expressed in an ephemeral *je ne sais quoi*:

Fashions could be of different sorts; which woman does not know that? [...] Fashion of the *bon ton* [good taste] is not catchy; you cannot even see in it, at first, anything special, but meanwhile there is something in it, *un je ne sais quoi*, which amazes even those who are not initiated in its sacraments.⁴¹²

This emphasis on the aristocratic sophistication corresponded to the interests of *Modnyi magazin*'s most privileged and high-standing female readers and allowed them to follow the taste and 'sartorial know-how' of the most distinguished European fashion leaders.⁴¹³

Nevertheless, the purely high-end discourse contradicted Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's inclusive targeting, which acknowledged that 'the majority of women belong to the middle circle, in which elegance [*shchegol'stvo*] unavoidably needs to be reconciled with economic considerations'.⁴¹⁴ To prove her editorial claim that 'everyone [can] dress well – according to their means',⁴¹⁵ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei adjusted the upper-class rhetoric by incorporating into it the practical approach and roles models characteristic of economy-conscious European middle-class magazines. This becomes most evident in the way the Russian editor redefined the aspirational image of the *parisienne* [парижанка] and instrumentalized this symbolic figure to make it suit and support her editorial framework.

Re-Defining the *parisienne*

⁴¹¹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 159. [тут требуется совершенная просто – наряд знатной дамы не должен резко отличаться от толпы: есть одно отличие, неподражаемое, неуловимое, присущее только женщинам хорошего круга – это вкус, выбор и *и что-то* такое изящное, что непременно выскажется].

⁴¹² Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1880, 159. [Моды бывают разных сортов; какая же женщина этого не знает? [...] Мода хорошего тона не бросается в глаза, в ней даже не заметно, на первый взгляд, ничего особенного, а между тем в ней есть что-то такое, *un je ne sais quoi*, которое поражает даже и не посвященных в ее тайнства. Нельзя определить что это такое: в большинстве случаев, какая-нибудь малость составляет многое].

⁴¹³ See Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 1994.

⁴¹⁴ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 250. [Большинство женщин принадлежит к среднему кругу, в котором щегольство должно непременно согласоваться к экономическими расчётами].

⁴¹⁵ Publication announcement for 1867, 1866, no. 23. [Хорошо одеваться могут все – по своему состоянию].

Best argues that in addition to aristocratic women of the highest ranks, the symbolic figure of the *parisienne* was the first female role model promoted by the nineteenth-century fashion press, in France as well as abroad. She epitomized the French capital's metropolitan allure and embodied exquisite fashionable femininity.⁴¹⁶ Furthermore, this commercialized image became 'the mythical representative of the consumerist dream' and, despite her aristocratic coding, 'presented the social hierarchy as being based on buying rather than birth'.⁴¹⁷ This image was actively shaped by the upmarket fashion press, especially *Le Moniteur de la mode*. Similarly, the figure of the *parizhanka* [Parisian woman] occupied a central place in Rekhnevskaja-Mei's rhetoric. However, her interpretation of this symbolic figure differed dramatically from the 'erotic desirability of *La Parisienne*' depicted by the French magazine.⁴¹⁸ In her fashion columns, Parisians were presented not only as women 'who are always well-dressed' but, first and foremost, as 'the female representatives of an economical toilette'.⁴¹⁹ Thus, while *Le Moniteur de la mode* popularized, as a role model, a metropolitan society lady who changed her outfit eight times per day, Rekhnevskaja-Mei presented a very different image:

No one dresses better than Parisian women, and no one less than a Parisian woman, even in the rest of France, chases novelty; nowhere else does one maintain such an economical toilette as in Paris. This is a *secret* of Parisians, which one need simply grasp in order to comprehend once and for all. We do not talk about those Parisians who lead a crazy life, visit three or four salons every evening, rush around the city all morning in the most striking outfits, pay unimaginable amounts of money for them, throw away what was worn two times and strive for only one thing – to be noticed. These [women] are not worth talking about – they are insignificant, limited creatures who live unconsciously, feverishly. They do not have *secrets worthy of studying*. We talk about reasonable and economical Parisians, inventive, elegant, with graceful instincts. They are always well dressed, but they do not spend *more* money than others, they only spend it *differently*.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 51.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 313. [Парижанки как представительницы экономии в туалете].

⁴²⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 122. [Никто так хорошо не одевается как парижанки, и никто меньше парижанок, даже в остальной Франции, не кидается на новизну; нигде не соблюдается такой экономии в туалете, как в Париже. Это *тайна* парижанок, которую только стоит проникнуть, чтобы усвоить себе раз навсегда. Мы не говорим о тех парижанках, которые ведут безумную жизнь, бывают каждый вечер в трех или четырех салонах, мчатся целое утро по городу в самых поразительных нарядах, платят за них невероятные деньги, бросают то, что было надето два раза и стремятся только к одному – чтобы их заметили. О таких не стоит разговаривать – это ничтожные, ограниченные создания, живущие бессознательно, в чад. У них нет *тайн, достойных изучения*. Мы говорим о разумных и экономных парижанках, изобретательных,

The Russian editor praised Parisians as the world's frontrunners in the art of dressing, whose 'main *shchegol'stvo*' [elegance] consisted in their 'thrif in clothing – as they have mastered this science particularly well – with [...] their secret being to spend less money than others on their clothing and always be fashionably dressed'.⁴²¹ The editor frequently encouraged her readers to learn 'a good thing'⁴²² from their Parisian counterparts: to combine elegance with 'thriftness' [расчетливость], in which they 'got the better of all other women'.⁴²³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei constantly suggested that her readers use what they already possessed: 'In general, before making new purchases, it is necessary to revise one's wardrobe and try to take advantage of what is [already] there'.⁴²⁴ She supported this claim by presenting the image of a Parisian woman that might seem paradoxical to her readers since seeking novelty was considered characteristic of provincial women rather than of metropolitan Parisians:

in Paris, economical women – and currently there are a lot of them – undoubtedly follow fashion but do not change [make] their outfits all the time; they, in particular, became especially skilful in transforming the old fashions [clothes] into new [fashionable] ones. [...] In this way, a [female] Parisian will not forsake a good dress simply because it has old-fashioned finishing, but will manage to remake it, according to the demands of fashion.⁴²⁵

Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei never referred to *La Mode illustrée* directly, but her presentation of middle-class 'economic and elegant Parisians' remaking their old dresses according to current fashion could have been informed by the standpoint developed in this French magazine. Its editor, Emmeline Raymond, instructed women on sewing and remaking their dresses and on economical approaches to fashion. Rekhnevskaja-Mei's depiction of *parizhanka* who 'will never make two or

щеголеватых, с изящными инстинктами. Они всегда хорошо одеты, но денег тратят не *больше* других, а только они их тратят иначе].

⁴²¹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 155. [распорядительности в одежде – так как эта наука далась им в особенности – и проникнуть их тайну – употреблять на туалет денег меньше других и быть всегда по моде одетой].

⁴²² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 331. [поучиться хорошему].

⁴²³ Ibid. [взявших, в этом отношении, верх над всеми остальными женщинами].

⁴²⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 306. [Вообще, прежде чем делать новые покупки, надо осмотреть свой гардероб и постараться извлечь пользу из того, что есть].

⁴²⁵ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 70. [Напрасно думают, что парижанки так любят перемены – эта страсть к новизне, скорее, принадлежность провинциалок: в Париже экономные женщины – а их, в настоящее время, очень много – без сомнения следят за модой, но не меняют то и дело своих нарядов; они, в особенности очень искусились в превращении старых мод в новые. [...] Таким образом, парижанка не бросит хорошего платья, от того что на нем старомодная отделка, а сумеет переделать его, сообразно требованию моды; тогда как экономная женщина, не умеющая работать, сохранит такое платье и будет носить его без изменений, что ей придаст отсталый и смешной вид. – Вот чего надо избегать и вот в чем заключается мысль нашего журнала: дать возможность следить за модой не тратя лишних денег на туалет].

three dresses serving one purpose at once'⁴²⁶ was thus possibly inspired by the image of economical femininity which Raymond presented for her middle-class compatriots. Therefore, the Russian editor appropriated the role model of a sophisticated *parisienne* shaped specifically by the elitist press and re-interpreted it in terms characteristic for the emerging popular press, thus combining the connotations of upmarket 'elegance' with middle-class 'economy'.

Within the French fashion press, these alternative role models were merged later in the century, after the 1880s, when 'tensions between maternal and erotic figures of femininity led to the creation of a new hybrid model of femininity, expressed in a somewhat redefined figure of *La Parisienne*'.⁴²⁷ In Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's magazine, such a hybrid model had already been shaped in the early 1860s, when the Russian editor tried to find a unified target model for her varied readership. While the fashion discourse of the European fashion press in the second half of the nineteenth century became increasingly intertwined with the formulation of class-related definitions of gender norms, the Russian editor transmitted these models to her readers in not only reconciled but idiosyncratically transformed representations. The latter is expressed most clearly in Rekhnevskaja-Mei's original editorial concept of *shchegol'stvo*, or elegance, which she developed as the central notion of her fashion commentary. In the following, I discuss in detail this concept and the way it became the key reference point in *Modnyi magazin*'s discourse on fashionable femininity.

4.2 Coining the editorial concept: *Shchegol'stvo*

Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's prioritization of elegance, or *shchegol'stvo*, over fashion and 'fashionability' was expressed in one of her very first fashion columns. Published in 1862, it can be considered the programmatic article that outlined the editorial standpoint for the following two decades. Thus, before talking about elegant [*shchegol'skie*] outfits, she suggested that her female readers first talk about elegance [*shchegol'stvo*]:

A French word, *élégance*, which in Russia is translated as *shchegol'stvo* – although it is not quite close – stems from the Latin *eligere*, which means to choose, to select. This very root explains, in the best way, the subject of our conversation. Indeed, *shchegol'stvo* is

⁴²⁶ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 155. [никогда не делает, за раз, двух или трех платьев для одного употребления].

⁴²⁷ Best, *History of Fashion press*, 50.

nothing other than a good choice of terms in a conversation, objects that surround us, the form and colour of clothes.⁴²⁸

This was followed by a lengthy and detailed explanation of how Rekhnevskaiia-Mei understood this term. Following this first article and throughout the twenty years of her fashion editorship, the editor developed a notion of *shchegol'stvo* that became the central point of reference in her fashion writing.

With regards to the contemporary European fashion-related context, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's emphasis on the art of choice, or elegance, as the central notion of *Modnyi magazin* was related to the phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century, which Philippe Perrot defined as the establishment of 'consumption in the modern sense; that is, consumption whose distinctive function was founded no longer simply on juridical and economic discrimination – purchasing power – but also on the social and cultural ability to discriminate – purchasing know-how'.⁴²⁹ In this context, one's ability to select came to signify the socio-cultural background of a person, individual perceptivity, and the awareness of the symbolic connotations of every nuance of an outfit. Reflecting this contemporary dynamic, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei repeatedly claimed: 'It is not enough to know what is worn – one should be able to choose'.⁴³⁰ *Shchegol'stvo* as the art of choosing outlined the editorial intention to guide her female readers in mastering this skill, which was gaining symbolic weight in the metropolitan code of conduct. In this way, the Russian editor popularized among her audience an emerging women's role as public arbiters of taste and pointed out a path for women to legitimately express themselves in the public space.

At the same time, cross-cultural innovativeness of this concept merits particular attention. Although the accurate translation of *shchegol'stvo* would be 'foppishness', Rekhnevskaiia-Mei coined her editorial term by redefining this notion by assimilating it with its foreign equivalent. She equated *shchegol'stvo* to the French word *élégance* with its emphasis on selectivity, smartness, and good taste and, in contrast to the original meaning of the Russian term, argued: 'a true *shchegol'stvo* does not unconditionally obey fashion'.⁴³¹ In this way, her interpretation criticized

⁴²⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 89-90. [Французское слово *élégance*, которое у нас передается щегольством, - хотя это и не совсем близко, - происходит от латинского *eligere*, что значит выбирать, избирать. Самый этот корень объясняет, лучше всего, предмет нашего разговора. Действительно, щегольство – ни что иное, как удачный выбор терминов в разговоре, предметов, окружающих нас, формы и цвета одежды].

⁴²⁹ Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 20.

⁴³⁰ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 300. [Недостаточно знать что носят – надо уметь выбрать].

⁴³¹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 250. [истинное щегольство не заключается в безусловном подчинении моде].

the phenomenon which *shchegol'stvo* originally signified, particularly uncritical mimicking of foreign culture, or 'slavish imitation of Western codes of refinement'.⁴³² In the Russian Empire (especially in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century press, literature, and theatre), the word *shchegol'stvo* had dubious connotations and was commonly used as an ironic term for those whose aim was to impress others with their Western looks: 'the stereotype of the affected young male or female socialite mad for foreign luxuries, the *shchegol'* and *shchegolikha'*, as Catriona Kelly defines it.⁴³³ At the turn of the nineteenth century, *shchegol'* and *shchegolikha* (e.g. dandies or posers) were popular protagonists of the Russian satirical press and theatre, which depicted them as 'Russian French': vain and ridiculous in their cultural rootlessness and loss of native identity.⁴³⁴ In this context, the notion *shchegol'stvo* referred to the shortcomings of the Westernization of Russians, expressed how superficially and incoherently foreign socio-cultural forms were adopted by them.

In contrast, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei distinguished this derogatory notion from her original idea of 'true *shchegol'stvo*'. According to the editor, Russians need neither slavishly imitate nor necessarily oppose or ignore foreign socio-cultural norms. Instead, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei suggested that they creatively and reasonably appropriate what could potentially benefit them. Contrary to the original meaning, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei thus encouraged Russian women to discriminately choose what was best suited specifically to them: 'The highest *shchegol'stvo* consists not as much in imitating the latest fashion as in knowing how to modify its best creations to fit one's face, figure, age and general appearance'.⁴³⁵ In this way, the editor suggested that her readers appropriate the aesthetic principle behind French *élégance* instead of simply parroting the material form – fashion: 'we should wish that our women expressed more initiative and not blindly trust their modistes: it is necessary to know how to choose – this is what the entire task consists of'.⁴³⁶ It was thus not fashion novelties but elegance which Rekhnevskaiia-Mei presented as the desirable target and of the highest value in regards to fashion.

⁴³² Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 137.

⁴³³ Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 139.

⁴³⁴ Kira Mirutina, 'Эволюция типов щеголя и щеголихи в комедийных жанрах русской драматургии и театра второй половины XVIII - начала XIX вв' [The Evolution of the *schegol'* and *shchegolikha* types in the Russian Comedy and Playwriting in the second half of the eighteenth – the beginning of the nineteenth century] (Ph.D. diss., Moscow, 2007).

⁴³⁵ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 69. [Самое высшее щегольство состоит еще не так в подражании последней моде, как в умении приновить лучшие ее создания к своему лицу, фигуре, летам и общему виду].

⁴³⁶ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 18. [надо желать чтобы наши женщины проявляли большее инициативы и не доверялись бы слепо своим портнихам: но надо уметь выбирать – в том вся и задача].

4.3 *Shchegol'stvo* and femininity

Shchegol'stvo, as the editor defined it, was suitable as the core concept for *Modnyi magazin* since its deliberate vagueness allowed the editor to present it as a universal ideal, flexible enough to remain relevant in all social circumstances. In the light of her inclusive targeting, it served the purpose of establishing a unified target, an aesthetic category that would be relevant – and potentially achievable – for women of varied means. While the latest fashion in all its sumptuousness was a priori not attainable for every woman, elegance was claimed to be:

We repeat once again what we have already said several times: *shchegol'stvo* is not an exclusive attribute of wealth; a woman with taste, although without a fortune, can be dressed as well as any female millionaire; all the difference consists in that one will be dressed *simply* and elegantly, and the other – richly.⁴³⁷

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei thus shifted the focus from the latest expensive fashion, accessible only to a few, to a more inclusive *shchegol'stvo*, presented as the modern ‘art of dressing’. For instance, she contended that, in the modern sense, ‘true *shchegol'stvo* consist[ed] not in the costliness of clothing but in the choice and coordination of colours and details of the toilette’.⁴³⁸ In this way, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s re-interpretation of *shchegol'stvo* supported, if not enabled, her to fulfil this role of a medium of fashion for Russian women from both within and outside the wealthy nobility. Her very definition of this term as the ability to choose was simultaneously a strategy for expressing one’s sophisticated knowledgeability, or ‘sartorial know-how’, and a strategy for economizing. According to her, ‘economy, in the reasonable meaning of the word, consist[ed] in knowing where to reduce the expenses and where to increase them’.⁴³⁹

Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei promoted the inclusive idea of elegance as based on aesthetic harmony and individual ability to select and match, something equally accessible for women of various socio-economic standings. The key element of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s *shchegol'stvo* was *poriadochnost'* [decency]. In her reasoning, it was this personal characteristic which determined a woman’s sense of beauty and appropriateness, or taste, and allowed her to be always elegant. Contrary to stressing social status or one’s perception by others, *poriadochnost'* emphasized

⁴³⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 62. [Повторяем то, что уже несколько раз было нами сказано: щегольство не есть исключительная принадлежность богатства; женщина со вкусом, хотя и без состояния, может быть так же хорошо одета, как любая миллионерка; разница вся в том, что одна будет просто и щегольско одета, а другая богато].

⁴³⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 73. [Настоящее щегольство состоит не в ценности одежды, но в выборе и согласовании цветов и принадлежностей туалета].

⁴³⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 142. [экономия, в разумном значении этого слова, заключается в том, чтобы знать, где сократить расходы и где их усилить].

moral, inner connotations generally unrelated to any particular social class: '*Shchegol'stvo* [...] is accessible to everyone and impossible for women who lack inner substance'.⁴⁴⁰ This is evident from Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's interpretation of taste: 'Taste does not depend on wealth; we see poor artisan women, elegantly dressed in simple dresses, and rich *barynias*' [ladies], invoking with their outfits criticism and mockery'.⁴⁴¹ Neither *shchegol'stvo* nor *poriadochnost*' could be imitated but only achieved as a visual side-effect of a woman's personality:

Any fashion, anything touched by a decent [*poriadochnaia*] woman becomes noble and meaningful. This can not be bought with money – one should have inner tact and upbringing; not that which others give to us, in the years of our first youth, but that which we, afterwards, give to ourselves.⁴⁴²

While genuine *shchegol'stvo*, or the desirable visual effect of distinction, only became attainable through cultural and moral (self-)education, this editorial concept became the basis for shaping the target image of femininity that surpassed the domain of fashion. Addressing the core conflict of nineteenth-century's fashion magazines, a contradiction between inner and outer beauty in search of a female ideal, the editor developed the notion of an elegant [*shchegolevataia*] woman whose outer image was a reflection and expression of her 'inner substance'. As early as in her programmatic article, the editor established this link between the visible, or external, qualities of a woman, and her inner world:

No matter from which side you look at the correlation between the qualities considered as shallow – those of gracefulness, politeness, *shchegol'stvo* – and the positive virtues, you always end up with the same unavoidable conclusion: these attractive advantages are only given to those possessing the core virtues – kindness and generosity.⁴⁴³

By linking elegance to women's 'inner substance' and *poriadochnost*', Rekhnevskaiia-Mei presented *shchegol'stvo* as having both aesthetic and ethical value and thus as being an ideal worth pursuing for any woman, regardless of her social standing. Rather than the financial means, both

⁴⁴⁰ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, p. 89. [Щегольство не составляет принадлежность богатства. Оно доступно всем и невозможно для тех женщин, которые не имеют внутреннего содержания].

⁴⁴¹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 2. [Вкус не зависит от состояния; мы видим бедных ремесленниц, щеголевато одетых в простые платья, и богатых барынь, возбуждающих своим нарядом критику и насмешки].

⁴⁴² Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 235. [И этого на деньги не купишь – надо иметь внутренний такт и воспитание; не то, которое дается нам другими, в лета нашей первой юности, а то, которое мы, в последствии, даем себе сами]

⁴⁴³ Ibid, p. 90. [С какой бы стороны ни посмотреть на сравнительные отношения между качествами, признанными пустыми, как например, грация, вежливость, щегольство – всегда придешь к одному и тому же, неизбежному заключению: что эти милые и привлекательные качества даны в удел только тем, кто вполне обладает основными добродетелями – добротой и великодушием].

shchegol'stvo and *poriadochnost'* reflected and required the cultural capital of a person. Even more so, the editor argued: 'A woman of modest means can be more elegant than a wealthy one, particularly if the latter acquired it by chance [невзначай] and thus did not have time to purify her taste and perceptions, while the wealth was growing'.⁴⁴⁴ This remark was addressed particularly to the readers from the aspiring social classes (e.g. merchantry). In this context, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei suggested that wealth, or rather the desire to show it off, could be the main obstacle for a woman to reach genuine elegance: 'If an innate *shchegol'stvo* is not granted to a rich or enriched woman, she can acquire it, but on that indispensable condition that she will forget about her wealth and will not make a parade of it in front of others'.⁴⁴⁵ As the same time, she suggested that '*shchegol'stvo* [...] should always be consistent, always loyal to itself' and thus similarly warned her readers that the desire to impress others by imitating wealth (e.g. by purchasing the clothes one could not afford) contradicted the very nature of elegance: 'in this case, as in many other, vanity does not attain its goal [...] and compels the impossibility of *shchegol'stvo*'.⁴⁴⁶ The editor thus encouraged women to develop their taste, instead of obsessing over fashion: 'It is true that people are born with taste, but it can also be acquired [...], and those who neglect this knowledge do poorly'.⁴⁴⁷ In all these ways, she was setting for her female readers the standard which linked the achievement of visual attractiveness to self-cultivation.

'Hybrid' model of femininity

The originality of the editorial rhetoric becomes evident when compared to the contemporary 'metropolitan' Parisian fashion press. The key factor which differed Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's discourse from that of both the upmarket and middle-class French magazines was that her primary editorial task was not to support the interests of any particular social class but rather to set the standards that would be relevant for her varied audience, consisting of society ladies as much as of housewives of modest means. While the proposed target reader of Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fashion chronicles was relatively vague in regards to her socio-cultural belonging, the editorial discourse on femininity, in fact constructed them, rather than reflecting any pre-existing ideas and ideals. In line with this tactic, she loosely interpreted *shchegol'stvo* and 'good taste' as the art of

⁴⁴⁴ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 90. [Небогатая женщина может быть щеголеватее богатой, в особенности если состояние последней досталось ей невзначай и она не успела очистить своего вкуса и понятий, пока возрастало богатство].

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. [Если же врожденного щегольства не дано богатой или обогатившейся женщине, она может приобрести его, но с тем неперменным условием, чтобы забыть о своем богатстве и не кичиться им перед другими].

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. [щегольство не может быть *перемежающимся*: оно должно быть всегда ровно, всегда верно себе]; [В этом случае, как и во многих других, тщеславие не достигает своей цели, и [...] влечет за собой невозможность щегольства].

⁴⁴⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 290. [Правда, что люди со вкусом рождаются, но он тоже и приобретается, и худо делают те, которые пренебрегают этим знанием].

avoiding any excesses and matching one's appearance with their particular socio-economic circumstances. Purposefully avoiding any markers of social affiliation, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei established an intentionally vague and flexible ideal which presented elegance as the expression of a woman's elevated personality: '*shchegol'stvo* depends more on the personality of a woman than on her environment, as well as on the *tact* which directs [her] every choice'.⁴⁴⁸ In all these ways, Rekhnevskaja-Mei presented a target which was inclusive in economic terms but discriminatory in culture and ethics.

In this regard, the Russian editor's rhetoric outpaced that of the Parisian fashion press. I have mentioned this before, but considering the foregoing, this topic invites more elaboration. Indeed, as Best points out, by the end of the 1880s, *Le Moniteur de la mode* described itself as being for the mistress of the house as much as for the '*femme élégante*'.⁴⁴⁹ This change of targeting towards inclusiveness, or 'hybridity', resulted in a redefinition of the *parisienne* and the creation of a new discriminatory notion: 'chic', which was understood as 'an aesthetic expression of the private individual that had little to do with money or rank'.⁴⁵⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei's interpretation of *shchegol'stvo*, with its emphasis on a woman's personality that, she contended, allowed 'her costume, even the most simple, [to] always have an elegant look' [имеет всегда щеголеватый вид], came very close to this later notion.⁴⁵¹ Even more interestingly, Best argues that by the end of the nineteenth century magazines such as *L'Art et La Mode* discussed fashion and dressing in regards to the universal aesthetic principles, equating them to art and suggesting that in order to dress with distinction, a woman, first and foremost, needed to respect a sense of line and colour. Similarly, Rekhnevskaja-Mei argued that 'one should avoid anything that could shock the eye of an artist' and presented *shchegol'stvo* as an ability to respect the universal laws of harmony: 'In fashion, nothing is ultimate, and one should not follow it at the expense of overall harmony and taste'.⁴⁵² According to Mei, dressing well was the 'art [that] require[d] some study' and the 'science' which could be learned: 'it is enough to know how to choose the cut of a dress and the colour which suits every type of face. There are certain general rules, of which we have already spoken many times'.⁴⁵³ Therefore, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's concept of *shchegol'stvo* as both

⁴⁴⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 62. [щегольство зависит более от личности особы, чем от ее обстановки, а также и от *такта*, который руководит каждым выбором].

⁴⁴⁹ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 54.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁵¹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 163. [Женщина со вкусом проявляется во всем и, ее костюм, даже самый простой, имеет всегда щеголеватый вид].

⁴⁵² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 18. [надо избегать всего, что может шокировать глаз артиста]; Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 73. [Искусство одеваться состоит в умении гармонизировать свой наряд со своей наружностью и заимствовать у моды только то, что она изобретает красивого и грациозного. [...] ей не должно следовать в ущерб общей гармонии и вкусу].

⁴⁵³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 73. [Это, кажется, так просто, что доступно каждому, а между тем хорошо одеваются очень не многие: очевидно искусство это требует некоторого изучения];

an expression of one's personality and an aesthetic principle was not only original but occurred in the Russian fashion press at least two decades earlier than it appeared in the metropolitan French fashion press.

Within this context, it is interesting to note that while shaping her original notion, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei nonetheless referred to Parisian fashion authority. This is related to the city's international prestige, which added symbolic weight and the allures of fashionability and modernity to any item or idea. According to Best, the attractiveness of Paris as the world's fashion capital resulted in other countries creation of false identities for retailers of fashion-related products and the attempted use of the city's allure for their benefit.⁴⁵⁴ Similarly, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei instrumentalized the elusive and commercialized image of a *parizhanka* [Parisian woman] to support her local editorial topics. For example, in one of her editorials Rekhnevskaiia-Mei specifically addressed her economically conscious readers on behalf of a 'very competent' Parisian woman, who shared her tricks in regards to preparing a wardrobe for an upcoming season. The latter explained that '[t]o preserve the *shchegol'stvo* of the toilette, without having the means to spend a lot of money, it [wa]s necessary to know a few general rules'.⁴⁵⁵ However, although Rekhnevskaiia-Mei presented these pieces of advice as written by a 'Parisian woman', the similarity of the vocabulary and arguments to Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's writing suggest that this entire passage was written by the editor herself:

I am not going to forsake the outfits which I [already] have in order to, like some women, buy everything again and enter into dreadful expenses. I am even convinced that, by doing this, I rank myself in the category of genuinely *decent* [*poriadochnykh*] women, who do not run unconditionally and feverously after all fashion *news* but calmly consider the main features of fashion and follow primarily those which fit their personalities and mean the most. Without having any claims on erudition, I know that the word *élégance* (the highest level of *shchegol'stvo*) originates from [the word] *eligere*, which in translation means – *to choose*'.⁴⁵⁶

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 290. [достаточно уметь выбрать покррой одежды и цвет, подходящие к типу каждого лица. Есть некоторые общие правила, о которых мы уже не раз упоминали].

⁴⁵⁴ Best, *History of Fashion Press*, 50.

⁴⁵⁵ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1867, 318. [чтобы сохранять щегольство в туалете, не имея возможности тратить много денег, необходимо знать несколько общих правил].

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid. [Я не намерена ликвидировать все имеющиеся у меня наряды, лишь для того, чтобы, по примеру некоторых женщин, закупить себе все вновь и войти тем самым в страшные издержки. Я даже убеждена, что поступая таким образом, я причисляю себя к категории истинно *порядочных* женщин, не гоняющихся безусловно и лихорадочно за всеми модными *новостями*, но спокойно соображающих главнейшие черты моды, придерживаясь преимущественно тех, которые наиболее подходят к их личности и средствам. Не имея

Presenting her own opinions as those of Parisians thus granted her editorial voice, symbolic weight and credibility in the eyes of her Russian audience. At the same time, this also fostered the development of positive associations and ‘metropolitan’ connotations with home dressmaking among Russian women and facilitated the sense of affiliation with ‘the cosmopolitan community of dress’⁴⁵⁷ – not only by following the same fashion but also by adopting the same practice. The next chapter particularly focuses on Rekhnevskia-Mei’s promotion of sewing and her context-specific interpretation of this women’s practice.

притязаний на ученость, я знаю, что слово *élégance* (высшая степень щегольства) происходит от глагола *eligere*, что значит в переводе - *избирать*].

⁴⁵⁷ See Kristin Hoganson, ‘The Fashionable World: Imagined Communities of Dress,’ in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 260-87.

Chapter 5: Women's work: from dressmaking to the woman question

As becomes clear from this discussion, the components of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's editorial framework and fashion discourse were, to a large extent, determined by her perceived mission to be 'a medium of fashion'. She understood the latter not merely in terms of informing her subscribers on modern fashion trends but, most importantly, as bringing them an opportunity to be fashionable themselves, to 'live' fashion in their varied circumstances: from the geographical and socio-cultural remoteness from the European metropolis to their economic limitations. In the editor's own words, throughout the years she aimed to deliver on this task in three major ways: She 'informed its [*Modnyi magazin*'s] female readers about all fashion news, selected for them the most 'decent' and effective styles, [and] provided excellently composed patterns with full explanations for producing them at home'.⁴⁵⁸ In the previous chapters, I have already discussed the first two components: informing and selecting. In what follows, I focus on the most practical element of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's editorial program: dress-making, which encouraged women to engage with fashion by sewing their own clothes.

5.1 Dressmaking and economy

Together with the concept of *shchegol'stvo*, the practice of sewing – accessible and socially appropriate for women of a broad social spectrum – became the key element which brought Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's hybrid editorial program together. By insisting that 'a hardworking and economical woman can be elegant, without entering into big expenses', she instructed women on how to make and remake their own dresses.⁴⁵⁹ Presenting sewing as 'one of the most necessary practical skills for women', the editor argued, on behalf of the editorial board: 'We always stand up against the excessive expenses for the toilette, being sure that one can achieve the same results at half the cost. One only need to take up a needle'.⁴⁶⁰ In one of her fashion columns, she explained this in detail:

nowadays the well-dressed are either those who have an opportunity to pay a lot or those who know how to work. But the latter have an advantage. [...] If you are used to work,

⁴⁵⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 179. [знакомил читательниц со всеми новостями моды, выбирал для них самые «порядочные» и эффектные фасоны, прикладывал отлично-составленный выкройки с полными объяснениями для приведения их в исполнение домашними средствами].

⁴⁵⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 291. [Трудолюбивая и экономная женщина может быть элегантна, не входя в большие издержки].

⁴⁶⁰ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 179. [Мы постоянно восстаем против излишней траты на туалет, будучи убеждены, что можно достигать тех же результатов с половинными издержками. Стоит только самим взяться за иголку].

you, receiving our magazine, revise your wardrobe, try the patterns on, consider what can be utilized and how, and make the old-fashioned items play the role of the fashionable.⁴⁶¹

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei thus tried to convince her female readers that dressmaking, exercised under the guidance of *Modnyi magazin*, would help or even enable them to keep up with fashion regardless of their location and socio-economic situation. For this, she ensured her subscribers that the fashion patterns provided by the magazine were of the highest quality and ‘metropolitan’ origin: ‘from the most important Parisian houses – therefore there can be no doubt [of their trustworthiness]’.⁴⁶² In particular, she was the first Russian fashion publisher and editor who provided readers with the full-size cut-out patterns of the latest Parisian fashion styles.⁴⁶³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei thus promised that even while sewing her dress at home, a woman would conform to the latest Parisian fashion.

The archival note on Rekhnevskaiia-Mei states that ‘the special [fashion] section of [*Modnyi magazin*] was so good and so well explained that, being subscribed to it, one could really sew dresses and other garments at home. [There were] [f]ashion feuillets and descriptions of patterns and needlework that she [the editor] wrote herself’.⁴⁶⁴ As I have already mentioned in the first chapter, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s own experience with sewing and remaking her dresses informed both the practical component of her magazine and her authoritative editorial voice inviting her female readers to follow her example. Persuading them in the viability of her suggestion, the editor directly referred to her personal experience and reassured her readers: ‘To learn how to sew dresses is not at all as difficult as it seems at first – you only need good will. We know this from experience and are sure that many, with the help of our advice, will want to overcome this seeming difficulty and will try their hand’.⁴⁶⁵ In her fashion editorials,

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. [в настоящее время одеваются хорошо те, кто имеет возможность дорого платить и те, кто умеет работать. Но последние имеют преимущество. [...] Если вы привычны к делу, вы, получая наш журнал, ревизуете свой гардероб, прикидываете выкройки, соображаете что и как можно утилизировать, и заставляете вышедшие из моды вещи играть роль новомодных].

⁴⁶² Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 354. [Им легче всего убедиться в этом, следя за описанием новейших туалетов и за нашими картинками, которые мы выписываем из главнейших парижских домов – так что тут сомнения быть не может. Наконец, это огромный ресурс для переделки туалетов – самим так не придумать].

⁴⁶³ ‘Materials from the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’, f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222. [Софья Григорьевна начала первая давать вырезные выкройки, в настоящую величину. Специальная часть его была так хороша и толково объяснялась, что получая его можно было действительно шить платья и другие предметы туалета дома. Модный фельетон и объяснение выкроек и работ она писала сама]. 1871, 344. [такие выкройки, которые долго остаются в моде].

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Materials from the biography, *Russian Old Times* [Русская старина], 4 February 1889, *The Pushkin House*, f. 265, op. 2, № 2222. [Софья Григорьевна начала первая давать вырезные выкройки, в настоящую величину. Специальная часть его была так хороша и толково объяснялась, что получая его можно было действительно шить платья и другие предметы туалета дома. Модный фельетон и объяснение выкроек и работ она писала сама].

⁴⁶⁵ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 179. [Научиться шить платья вовсе не так трудно, как это кажется вначале – нужна лишь добрая воля. Мы это знаем по опыту и уверены, что многие, с помощью наших советов, захотят преодолеть эту кажущуюся трудность и попробуют свою руку].

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei regularly shared ideas on how to utilize old items for making a new fashionable dress.

Modnyi magazin claimed that its ‘main task’ consisted in ‘enabling women to dress well with their own means’.⁴⁶⁶ In the editor’s rhetoric, dressmaking was presented as a practical necessity, particularly pressing as far as large families were concerned: ‘With insufficient wealth and an extended family, the situation becomes hopeless if women themselves do not know how to work, yet have no money to pay dressmakers’.⁴⁶⁷ At the same time, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei claimed that sewing and remaking one’s own dresses was the way for a woman to lighten the financial burden of a family, for instance, that had unmarried girls: ‘With these models, our cut-out patterns and a sewing machine, young girls could themselves realize charming toilettes inexpensively’.⁴⁶⁸ To encourage women to learn how to make their dresses as well as to legitimize this practice as appropriate even for gentry women, the editor referred to her experience confirmed: ‘I do not find it too difficult, on my part, to change the styles of my dresses and turn old toilettes into fashionable and fresh ones’.⁴⁶⁹ Therefore, while suggesting her readers to practically engage with fashion, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei lead by her own example and was a living role model for her audience.

Sewing and femininity

In all these ways, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei promoted dressmaking as a modern and respectable women’s practice – as much as the women editors of popular fashion magazines in France, Britain, and Germany. Marianne Van Remoortel discusses the pan-European shift towards a hands-on approach to fashion which was fostered by the emerging popular fashion press in different countries: *La Mode illustrée* in France, *Der Bazar* in Germany. Van Remoortel calls it ‘a key moment in the history of fashion and in women’s history’ when ‘femininity became, quite literally, “makeable”’.⁴⁷⁰ Margharet Beetham also points out to that this hand-on approach to fashion

⁴⁶⁶ Publication announcement for 1865, *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, no. 22. [«Модный магазин» не ограничивается сообщением сведений о современном состоянии моды: главная задача его состоит в том, чтобы дать читательницам возможность хорошо одеваться домашними средствами].

⁴⁶⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 19 [При недостаточном состоянии и при многочисленном семействе, положение становится безвыходным, если женщины не умеют сами работать, а портникам платить нечем].

⁴⁶⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1881, 101 [С этими моделями, с нашими вырезными выкройками и со швейной машиной, молодые девушки могут исполнять сами прелестные туалеты в недорогую цену].

⁴⁶⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 274 [Я не нахожу, со своей стороны, большого труда изменять фасоны моих платьев и превращать прежние туалеты в новомодные и свежие].

⁴⁷⁰ Marianne Van Remoortel, ‘Women Editors and the Rise of the Illustrated Fashion Press in the Nineteenth Century,’ in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 39, no. 4 (2017): 269.

redefined woman's work from the 'fancy, non-functional needlework' of the preceding ladies' magazines to 'explicitly functional' women's activity.⁴⁷¹

However, these practices were also interpreted slightly differently across the national borders. For instance, Margharet Beetham discusses how for Isabella Beeton, the woman editor of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, paper patterns for home dressmaking became the link through which she reconciled the images of cosmopolitan Parisian fashion with her middle-class editorial agenda focused on domesticity and housekeeping. In Beeton's rhetoric, dressmaking promised 'the woman as a 'practical dress-maker' a means, through her domestic skills, of realizing herself as the woman from the fashion-plate'.⁴⁷² In her editorial framework, cut-out paper patterns became the material bridge between the projected middle-class female image as the industrious 'household manager' and the upper-class 'fashionable lady' from the Parisian fashion plates.⁴⁷³ For the Russian editor, the opposite was equally – or even more – relevant and important: she aimed to turn a lady 'as a desired object' into a woman as a skilled subject. The following citation sheds light on the innovative character of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's editorial program for a Russian audience, particularly for the gentry:

When we founded our magazine and first started to convince our female compatriots to learn how to sew their dresses themselves – the majority took this as a joke, our suggestion seemed to be something impossible. Four years have passed since *Modnyi magazin* has been pursuing this idea. [...] Our efforts have been met with success; the majority of our female subscribers learned how to work: in the editorial office, we receive many grateful letters, and more than one father of a family has confessed to us that since *Modnyi magazin* has appeared, the budget for the toilette expenses of his daughters has decreased.⁴⁷⁴

Rekhnevskaja-Mei's promotion of dressmaking thus encouraged leisured gentry ladies (particularly the impoverished ones) to see themselves as subjects, or actors -- skilled, practical, and industrious – in contrast to passive objects of desire suggested by luxurious fashion plates.

⁴⁷¹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 75-78.

⁴⁷² Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 76.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 179. [Когда мы основали свой журнал, и впервые стали убеждать своих соотечественниц поучиться шить самим свои платья – большинство приняло это за шутку, предложение наши показалось чем-то невозможным. Прошло четыре года, Модный магазин преследовал свою идею (...) Старания наши увенчались успехом; большинство наших подписчиц научилось работать: в редакции получается множество благодарственных писем, и не один отец семейства признавался нам, что с тех пор как появился Модный магазин, бюджет туалетных расходов дочерей его значительно сократился. Это очень понятно: в настоящее время одеваются хорошо те, кто имеет возможность дорого платить и те, кто умеет работать. Но последние имеют преимущество].

This brings us to the more subtle editorial agenda behind Rekhnevskaja-Mei's promotion of sewing.

Sewing and Rekhnevskaja-Mei's social agenda

In 1861, the year before the launch of her magazine, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei submitted to the authorities her statement of intent for publishing *Modnyi magazin*. In what Ruane has called a 'bold statement of independence, which certainly must have startled the Central Censorship Administration', the future editor declared:

In enlightened countries, women have long understood the importance of useful work. Every educated Englishwoman already sews her own clothing and gives her *fiancé* a handmade shirt as a wedding gift, but we still waste time embroidering screen and pillows and other such things whose finishings use up so much money and would be so easy to manage without. Is it not time that we return to more practical pursuits and remember that 'time is money'?⁴⁷⁵

Rekhnevskaja-Mei's (to a certain extent idealized) reference to 'enlightened' Western countries in the presentation of her editorial program was not only meant to attribute credibility to her argument in the eyes of a censor but also evidenced her awareness of both the cultural and gender-based peripherality of Russian women. Rekhnevskaja-Mei pointed out Russia's backwardness, reflected in the fact that women 'from the educated classes', in her own terms, were generally confined to a demoralizing idleness. Ruane points out that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, gentry-women started to feel the increasing frustration of their leisured and meaningless existence, symbolically expressed in living-room embroidery.⁴⁷⁶ At the same time, they were victims of preconceptions against women's work as such, which women, of the upper class in particular, themselves generally shared. This becomes evident in the above-quoted remark by Mei, in which she claimed that her suggestion for Russian women to make their own clothes was first 'taken as a joke' and 'seemed impossible'.⁴⁷⁷

In contrast to such opinions, Rekhnevskaja-Mei suggested that one's mere 'good will' sufficed for engaging with a practical activity and to benefit from it economically as well as morally. For example, she argued: 'Nowadays, as women understand the need for practical knowledge [skills] and learn how to work [...], we advise our female readers to acquire sewing

⁴⁷⁵ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 93.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 43-67.

⁴⁷⁷ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', 1866, 179.

machines; this will deliver them both benefit and entertainment'.⁴⁷⁸ Her mention of both benefit and entertainment pointed out that practical activity was essential to women's overall well-being – a conviction which lay at the very heart of Rekhnevskaja-Mei's standpoint. Thus, while in her statement of intent Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei indeed, as Ruane maintains, advocated for 'her own right to make money as the publisher of a fashion magazine',⁴⁷⁹ her overall message affirmed that work was both appropriate and necessary for women, as much for ladies as for working-class women.

What is remarkable in Rekhnevskaja-Mei's statement of intent is that she did not specifically emphasize fashion as the key reason for Russian women to engage in dressmaking. Neither did she, despite her mention of Englishwomen, refer to domestic ideals or housekeeping as a way to support her argument for turning the traditional ladies' needlework into 'useful work'. To compare, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, as becomes evident from my previous comments and its very title, aimed at promoting middle-class domesticity and presented 'both a 'pleasing' appearance and dedication to the home as duties of prime importance'.⁴⁸⁰ In contrast, the Russian editor presented sewing not necessarily as the duty of a woman but as a means to improve her life, broaden her opportunities, allow her to engage in meaningful practical activity – in other words, as a way to free her from her idleness.

In this context, it is interesting to discuss the role models which the editor suggested to her readers. A remarkable example of such role models could be the following image which Rekhnevskaja-Mei described in her column:

I have one female friend – a genuine fairy! [woman magician] No one dresses better than her in Petersburg (in the reasonable and poetic sense of this word) and no one spends less money on her outfits. To begin with, she sews everything at home [...] I visited her the other evening. She was sitting alone, in her cosy living room, in front of a lamp, at a round table, surrounded by books, journals (among them, *Russkii Arkhiv* [Russian archive], *Vestnik Evropy* [Europe's Herald], an English novel, and *Revue des Deux Mondes*, I

⁴⁷⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 158. [Теперь, когда женщины поняли необходимость практических знаний и научились работать [...] Мы советуем нашим читательницам шиться швейными машинами, это доставит им и пользу и развлечение].

⁴⁷⁹ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 93.

⁴⁸⁰ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 76.

noticed a corner of *Modnyi magazin*), working drawers, small baskets – I tell you, she works as a fairy.⁴⁸¹

After presenting the dressmaking ideas of this woman for the upcoming season, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei added: ‘I hope that the example of my fair lady will not pass without a trace for most of my young female readers’.⁴⁸² Be she real or imaginary, this figure was thus presented as an example for be followed. This sheds further light on the image of femininity which Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei presented in her fashion section. In the above quote, what is particularly interesting is the range of readings ‘noticed’ by Rekhnevskaiia-Mei at her table. In contrast to what the practice of the economical home dressmaking would suggest, these journals do not project the domestic ideal of a good housewife and mother, but instead shape the inspirational image of the well-informed, curious, and cultured lady. Her industriousness and practicality, which allowed her to be the most well-dressed, not only did not contradict to her attractiveness and respectability but, on the contrary, were closely related to it. However, contrary to the European middle-class press, French as well British, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei did not raise this hands-on approach in regards to women’s role as housekeeper. On the contrary, her emphasis on ‘time is money’ suggests connotations which are the opposite to those invoked, for example, by the British discourse of domesticity, as built upon the strict division of spheres between men and women. Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s rhetoric encouraged Russian women to participate in socio-economic life by exploring and expanding those limited opportunities that were available to them. Sewing was among these widely accessible options.

Legitimizing women’s labour

Ruane argues that Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s standpoint of intent reflected the overall liberal spirit of the period in the Russian Empire, in particular the idea of the emancipatory role of work for upper-class women raised by Maria Vernadskaiia, the first Russian woman economist and co-editor of *Ekonomicheskii ukazatel’* (Economic Index, 1857-1861), who presented ‘women’s participation in the paid labor force as a direct path to emancipation and greater happiness’.⁴⁸³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s emphasis on *women’s work* formed part of her overall editorial standpoint, which presented

⁴⁸¹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 314. [Есть у меня одна знакомая – истая фея! Никто не одевается лучше ее в Петербурге (в разумном и поэтическом смысле этого слова) и никто не тратит меньше денег на наряды. Начать с того, что она все шьет дома [...] Я заехала к ней как-то вечером. Она сидела одна, в своей уютной гостиной, перед лампой, за круглым столом, обложенная книгами, журналами (между Русским Архивом, Вестником Европы, английский романом, Revue des Deux Mondes, я заметила уголок Модного магазина), рабочими ящичками, корзиночками].

⁴⁸² Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 314. [Я надеюсь, что пример моей феи не пройдет бесследно для большинства моих юных читательниц].

⁴⁸³ Ruane, *Empire’s New Clothes*, 55.

work, as such, as the universal ‘law of the new time’, according to the title of one of her articles published in the literary section of *Modnyi magazin*, to which I will return in the third chapter. At the same time, it was not only contemporary intellectual debates on women’s social roles but, once again, the editor’s personal experience that informed her convictions and, as a result, her editorial agenda. Her sister Anna Polianskaia describes how, in the years of her marriage to Lev Mei, Sofia ‘earned money not only with (piano) lessons, but even with fine needlework, to which she had a great talent’.⁴⁸⁴ The same practical intention – to earn money – informed her decision to launch *Modnyi magazin*, with whose revenue she covered her first husband’s debts and later supported her parents and younger sister. The editor’s personal conviction in women’s ability to support themselves found its expression in her fashion discourse.

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s overall social standpoint in regards to women’s labor was evident in how she, while discussing the novelties seen in a St. Petersburg department store, noticed: ‘this is the only store in Gostinyi dvor, where women are trading –progress which we cannot help but celebrate’.⁴⁸⁵ Most importantly, regularly she applied her magazine’s advertising potential to support women who earned their living with needlework and dressmaking. The number of women dress- and hat-makers, seamstresses, and needle-workers promoted in Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s fashion column is remarkable. To encourage her readers to place their orders in small ateliers run by women and address individual women artisans instead of big shops, the editor praised their experience, artistic taste, reliability, low prices as well as referred to her editorial authority to vouch for the quality of their services. For example, in regards to the sewing atelier of Ms. Esaulova, she argued: ‘without lavishing praise on the taste and expertise of [its] woman manager, we only wish that our female readers familiarize themselves with her: we are convinced that they will not want to have another dressmaker’.⁴⁸⁶ To give just another from among numerous examples, the editor praised Ms. Ivanova who ‘executed everything with great taste and very neatly and charged outstandingly little for her artistic works’.⁴⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei particularly focused on *Russian* women workers. This becomes evident from her frequent comments on the expensiveness of clothes produced by foreigners: ‘who among us does not know that French modistes take a huge percent for their presentability, for their selling

⁴⁸⁴ Polianskaia, Anna. ‘Биография С.Г. Рехневской’ [Biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei], f. 257, d. 88. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House). [зарабатывала не только уроками (музыки), но и даже изящными рукоделиями, до которых была большая мастерица].

⁴⁸⁵ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1868, 337. [Это единственный магазин в Гостином дворе, где торгуют женщины – прогресс, которому мы не можем не порадоваться].

⁴⁸⁶ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 284. [не расточаясь в похвалах вкусу и знанию дела распорядительницы, мы желаем только, чтобы наши читательницы с ней ознакомились, и убеждены, что они не захотят иметь другой модистки].

⁴⁸⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Fashions’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 300. [она все это исполняет с большим вкусом, чрезвычайно аккуратно и берет за свои артистические работы чрезвычайно дешево].

skills'.⁴⁸⁸ In this way, she not only encouraged Russian women to consider making their own dresses, but to also place their orders at ateliers run by their female compatriots who, she reassured them, provided services as good as those of French dress-makers:

French women master that art, we should give them credit for this, but they charge so much for everything! We have recently become acquainted with one Russian *barynia* [lady] who used to study in a famous French store and is gifted with the great natural taste. Now, forced by circumstances, she works at home [...] and charges incomparably less than the shops. We saw her work and promised to ourselves to pass her address on to our female subscribers so that they can, in case of necessity, use our recommendation'.⁴⁸⁹

Such announcements, commonly presented as spontaneous side-remarks to the description of the latest fashions, were adjusted to the readers' potential interests, be they high quality reasonable prices or exclusive services that such women-run enterprises could offer, thus incentivising her readers to try them. Frequent remarks about extremely cheap prices suggest that these advertisement – at least some of them – were not of a commercial but a social nature. Sometimes Rekhnevskaja-Mei directly expressed her agenda in this respect, as in the following: 'Fully sympathetic to women's work, we are always happy to inform in our magazine about any phenomena of this type, especially when we can, by giving work to those who need it, bring benefit to our subscribers'.⁴⁹⁰ While the majority of *Modnyi magazin*'s female readers themselves were far from such a desperate situation which would force them to earn their living, the editor's supportive rhetoric legitimized the idea of paid women's labour as modern and respectable. Her efforts towards changing public attitudes on this issue should not be underestimated, especially in the decades following the liberal reforms, when the abstract question of women's participation in the labour force became for many an issue of practical necessity and utmost urgency. In addition, such remarks could give some readers the idea of putting their sewing skills to use and launch their own ventures.

⁴⁸⁸ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 158. [за свою презентабельность, за умение продать товар лицом].

⁴⁸⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 10. [Этим искусством обладают француженки, надо им отдать справедливость; но у них все так дорого! мы недавно познакомились с одной русской барыней, учившейся когда-то в известном французском магазине, и одаренная большим природным вкусом. Теперь, вынужденная обстоятельствами, она работает дома, [...] и берет несравненно дешевле, чем в магазинах. Мы видели ее работу и дали себе слово сообщить ее адрес нашим подписчицам, чтобы они могли, в случае необходимости, воспользоваться нашей рекомендацией].

⁴⁹⁰ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 364. [Вполне сочувствуя женскому труду, мы всегда с радостью сообщаем в своем журнале о подобных явлениях, в особенности когда можем, доставляя работу нуждающимся, доставить в то же время выгоду нашим подписчикам].

Particularly interesting is the role which Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei assigned to wealthy women: that of socially responsible consumers. Editorial rhetoric was aimed at raising the awareness of her rich readers about the difficult or even desperate situation of those women for whom needlework was the only way to support themselves and their families. In this respect, the editor claimed:

When a woman millionaire is bragging in front of me about how little she spends on her toilette, how she bargains a few rubles from her seamstress – I start pitying her: she confesses to an unforgivable act: that she takes away from a poor woman worker even those small crumbs which fall down from her luxurious table.⁴⁹¹

In contrast to the behaviour cited, Rekhnevskaja-Mei encouraged wealthy women to help the poor survive through their consumption of fashion goods. She often pointed out that wealthy women's wishes to follow the latest fashions benefitted poor women: 'how many hands are occupied, how many poor people are earning a living for their whole families! Do not give alms but give work!'.⁴⁹² Once again, she supported her argument with reference to the metropolitan French authority, e.g. by quoting 'one of the most adorable Parisian fashion magazines'⁴⁹³ whose fashion journalist argued that women's coquetry provided people with work. Elsewhere, she mentioned the 'humanness' [человеколюбие] of the managers of the Parisian department stores who, in order to provide their female employees with work during the siege of Paris of 1870-1871, turned a complex embroidering technique that appealed to the wealthy upper-class *élégantes* [*shchegolikh*] fashionable. For her part, the Russian editor pointed to local opportunities to implement such ideas in Russia. One example of this is her attempt to promote an ancient Russian lace-making technique as a commercially promising craft. After reporting on a new type of lace, invented by Parisians, Rekhnevskaja-Mei stressed that it was very similar to the Russian one, which was 'completely unknown abroad' but would 'have be enormous successful there'.⁴⁹⁴ In this regard, she contended:

⁴⁹¹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 32. [Сама природа вложила в женщину потребность наряжаться и разнообразить свой наряд. Я вижу тут благую цель: сколько рук при этом занято, сколько бедняков кормятся с целыми семьями! Не подавайте милостыни, но давайте работу! Когда миллионерка хвалится при мне, как мало она издерживает на свой туалет, как она выторговывает несколько рублей у своей портнихи – мне становится жаль ее: она сознается в непростительном проступке: в том, что отнимает у бедной труженицы и те крупинки, которые падают с ее роскошного стола].

⁴⁹² Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, p. 32. [сколько рук при этом занято, сколько бедняков кормятся с целыми семьями! Не подавайте милостыни, но давайте работу].

⁴⁹³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1881, 106. [один из самых очаровательных парижских журналов].

⁴⁹⁴ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 67. [совсем не известно за границей и будет там иметь громадный успех, в чем я лично убедилась прошлым летом в Баден-Бадене].

It would not hurt if those who are responsible for this take it into consideration and develop this branch of industry for export. Charitable societies could also take advantage of this opportunity to deliver work to poor women, as this product is expected to be in great demand.⁴⁹⁵

Furthermore, since Rekhnevskaiia-Mei was speaking not just about poor people in general but, first and foremost, about poor *women*, her rhetoric called for women's solidarity and active support for their female compatriots in need. In general, the editor's remarks attempted to evoke in women, especially wealthy upper-class ladies, a sense of responsibility and social duty in regards to less fortunate countrywomen. For example, she discussed the lot of 'the miserable class of seamstresses, which largely does not have stable work and is thus deprived of the opportunity to support themselves through honest work'.⁴⁹⁶ As a response to this pressing social problem, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei stressed the urgent need to create employment opportunities for women, particularly in dressmaking, as far as the fashion column was concerned.

Noblesse oblige: sewing and feminist philanthropy

Apart from being the editor, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei was also an engaged women's activist, and in her social activity, sewing and dress-making became the key domain through which she tried to help women in need find employment. This idea was first raised in Russian intellectual circles by radical thinker Nikolai Chernyshevskii. In his canonical novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), he created the image of the New Russian Woman who, as part of her search for a meaningful life, organized a successful sewing cooperative aimed at providing employment for poor girls. This novel became a sensation in Russian society. Just one year after *What Is to Be Done?* was published, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei together with prominent Russian feminist Anna Filosofova, launched a philanthropic fashion atelier and a fashion store which taught and employed seamstresses. In *Modnyi magazin's* fashion column, the editor actively promoted the services of this philanthropic organization among her readers and encouraged her readers to support the work of poor women, 'primarily mothers of families, who, therefore, do not have an opportunity to live in other people's houses [working as servants] and apart from a needle could not find any other

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. [Не мешало бы принять это в соображение кому следует и развить эту отрасль промышленности, в видах экспортации. Благотворительные общества могли бы тоже воспользоваться этим случаем для доставления работы бедным женщинам, так как на этот товар предвидится большой спрос].

⁴⁹⁶ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1868, 415. [Этот несчастный класс швей, не имеющий по большей части постоянной работы и лишенный таим образом возможности содержать себя честным трудом].

means of existence'.⁴⁹⁷ Furthermore, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei explained the broader social vision behind this initiative:

This needlework atelier functions under the patronage of high-standing persons who [...] have established it with the aim of spreading women's labour and helping the poor – not with money or temporary allowance but by providing them with permanent work and selling [the products of their work] in their establishment. This idea speaks for itself and cannot but find common sympathy; it is only a pity that not many people know about the existence of such a wonderful institution.⁴⁹⁸

In 1874, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei founded the Ladies' Circle for the patronage of a similar project, St. Kseniia's Shelter, which aimed at supporting orphan girls in St. Petersburg by providing them with accommodation, vocational training, and the infrastructure for fair employment: a fashion atelier and affiliated fashion store. In the years following the launch of this project, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fashion column became a way for her to advertise the products made and sold in St. Kseniia's Shelter: 'I remind you, dear *mesdames* [милостивые государыни], about the Shelter for girls, which accepts orders for dresses, underwear and everything related to women's and children's toilettes. All these things are made outstandingly carefully, conscientiously and with great taste'.⁴⁹⁹ Interestingly enough, *Modnyi magazin* invited its women readers to contribute to this charitable initiative not only by patronising its fashion services, but also by making direct donations and becoming members of the Ladies' Circle. Although such calls for participation were commonly discussed in the literary section, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei frequently finished her editorials with reminders about the activities and products of the fashion atelier and, most importantly, published the names of the donors. By placing the list of donors right under her signature at the end of the fashion column, Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei emphasized her personal patronage of the initiative, attributing symbolic weight to it. Furthermore, apart from using the magazine's fashion editorial as a popular platform for increasing the visibility of the project, the editor popularized the idea of women's organized social engagement. In this regard, this initiative and its founders provided Russian noble-ladies with an example of a practical activity which was

⁴⁹⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 279. [большую частью матерям семейства, которые, стало быть, не имеют возможности жить в чужих домах и кроме иглы не могут найти никаких средств к существованию].

⁴⁹⁸ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, 364. [рукодельня это состоит под покровительства высоко поставленных в обществе особ, имеющих за ней наблюдение и учредивших ее с целью распространения женского труда и помощи бедным – не деньгами и не временным пособием, а постоянным доставлением им работы и сбыта ее в своем заведении. Мысль эта говорит сама за себя и не может не найти общего сочувствия; жаль только, что не многие знают о существовании такого прекрасного учреждения].

⁴⁹⁹ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 47. [Напоминаю, милостивые государыни, о Приюте для девиц, где принимают заказы на платья, белье и все относящееся к женскому и детскому туалету. Все эти вещи исполняются чрезвычайно аккуратно, добросовестно и с большим вкусом].

not only beneficial for poor women but could also be a meaningful endeavor suitable for their own social standing.

It is important to mention Christine Ruane's critical argument on the gendering of sewing which was happening in the Russian Empire throughout the nineteenth century. She discusses how this skill became a quintessentially women's practice, which eventually resulted in the denial of its status as skilled work. In this context, Ruane argues that the emancipatory projects of both Mariia Vernadskaia and influential Nikolai Chernyshevskii were in fact less progressive than they seemed to be at the time because they depicted sewing among the primary domains for women's labour and thus 'reinforced the gendered notions of work'.⁵⁰⁰ From a modern point of view, this conclusion is, of course, very valid. Nevertheless, at the time, in the context of women's general exclusion from public life and paid labour force, the above-discussed opinions were not just thought-provoking but truly revolutionary. This is, of course, even more relevant in regards to Sofia Rekhnevskiaia-Mei's fashion discourse, a priori restrained by its key subject. Furthermore, the fact that she herself was engaged in the publishing business demonstrates how her ideas regarding women's work were certainly not confined to the gendered domain of needlework. On the contrary, as I have argued, even within a specific fashion-related context, the editor promoted, first and foremost, not sewing in and of itself but an overall change in women's self-perception, traditional demoralizing lifestyle, and extremely limited opportunities for supporting themselves through 'honest work'. By using the broadly accessible trade of hands-on dress-making as a showcase, she attempted to convince her female readers that this activity could have practical and tangible results, be they of a private, commercial or social nature. The editor's discussions on these issues in her fashion column pointed out her intention to link fashion to the wider context, presenting it not merely as the world of luxurious fantasies, but as part of social reality and its down-to-earth problems. At the same time, presented as part of fashion discourse, these pro-women ideas acquired the attractive allure of modernity and trendiness. As a result, '[w]ithout even touching politics (God forbid!) and remaining within the microscopic circle of [her] specialization',⁵⁰¹ Rekhnevskiaia-Mei subtly promoted an emancipatory agenda among her largely conventional, socially and geographically dispersed female readership.

To sum up, on the one hand, the editorial standpoint in regards to sewing reflected the pan-European fashion press' development which redefined woman's work as explicitly functional women's activity. On the other hand, contemporary Russian debates on women's social status and

⁵⁰⁰ Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes*, 57.

⁵⁰¹ Rekhnevskiaia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 362. [Не касаясь нимало политика (Боже сохрани!) и вращаясь только в микроскопическом кружке своей специальности].

Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's personal convictions were the decisive factors behind her editorial program on encouraging her female compatriots to develop their practical skills to their advantage, individually as well as collectively. Most importantly, the editor herself had experience in each of these ways of engaging in practical goal-oriented activity which she suggested to her female readers: from making one's own dresses to earning money with needlework to noble-women organizing in support of women in need of financial independence. Moreover, her sense of affiliation and solidarity with each of these groups of women resulted in her confident editorial voice transgressing the class-related boundaries and fostering women's self-perception as a social group. In this regard, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's rhetoric on sewing signifies a transition and the most direct link to her overall editorial agenda on negotiating women's status and role in society. As the following chapter will demonstrate, this question constituted the major idea raised and discussed in the literary section of *Modnyi magazin*.

Concluding remarks

By analyzing Rekhnevskaja-Mei's fashion rhetoric, I discussed her attempts to negotiate Russian women's roles through creative interpretation, or the assimilation of foreign socio-cultural forms. Rekhnevskaja-Mei developed an original editorial program which brought together various sources and audiences and, in this respect, constituted in itself an 'innovative act of cultural brokerage'.⁵⁰² The format of *Modnyi magazin* was 'hybrid' in relation to both the segmented European fashion press and the local market, functioning as a transition from the elitist to the popular fashion press.

We return to the main question of this dissertation: How did Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, in a broad sense, perform the function of a peripheral intellectual negotiating the very peripherality of her female readers as Russians and as women? In the introduction to this dissertation, I mentioned that the adaptation of Western gendered norms presented Russian women with opportunities to broaden the spectrum of their traditional roles and representations.⁵⁰³ In her fashion discourse, Rekhnevskaja-Mei, as a Russian woman intellectual, creatively assimilated the metropolitan influence by transforming it into socio-cultural forms which aimed to benefit Russian women, in particular by broadening their opportunities for self-expression and self-realization. Such assimilation is reflected in the idiosyncratically critical system of values and representations which the editor suggested to her audience in the form of standards for appreciation.

Within this framework, Rekhnevskaja-Mei offered Russian women the redefined notion of a *shchegolevataia*, or elegant woman. This idea, or ideal, merged aesthetic and ethical considerations and prioritized this common standard over socio-economic discrepancies, thus bridging fashionable femininity to wider socio-cultural reality. Rekhnevskaja-Mei's rhetoric emphasized neither the particular class nor purchasing power but the individual cultural and moral levels as necessary preconditions for both *shchegol'stvo* and *poriadochnost'* [decency]. In this way, the editor instrumentalized women's desire to be fashionable and visually distinct from others as a way to incentivize them to develop a more comprehensive attitude to not only the way they dress but also their very self-perception: both as Russians and as women. In contrast to mimicry, suggested in particular by the original Russian notion of *shchegol'stvo* and generally characteristic to the Westernized Russian culture, Rekhnevskaja-Mei argued that Russian women neither slavishly imitate nor necessarily oppose or ignore foreign socio-cultural norms. Instead, Rekhnevskaja-Mei suggested that they appropriate creatively and reasonably that which could

⁵⁰² Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 242.

⁵⁰³ See 'Introduction', 22.

potentially benefit them. In line with this reasoning, the redefined concept of *shchegol'stvo* became a vantage point according to which the Russian editor refracted and merged the Western upper- and middle-class discourses, using them to enrich, broaden, and strengthen her own rhetoric, which she found most beneficial for her readers. The Russian fashion editor performed as an intellectual leader of her community and, thanks to her professional expertise and individual standpoint, promoted among those socio-cultural norms which not only helped readers feel connected to the cosmopolitan community, but also aimed at broadening their own local opportunities. This becomes most evident in her interpretation of women's work as a productive, goal-oriented activity that could potentially lead women to emancipation and greater happiness.

Section Three. ‘Less Words and More Action, Emancipators!’: the Feminist Agenda of *Modnyi magazin*

Introduction

In this chapter, I continue to discuss the role of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei as a Russian woman intellectual who negotiated the double socio-cultural peripherality of her female Russian readership. The previous chapter was dedicated to studying *Modnyi magazin* as a fashion magazine. Accordingly, I discussed how the editor interpreted European fashion for her culturally and geographically ‘peripheral’ female Russian subscribers while simultaneously addressing their gender-based peripherality. In this chapter, I regard *Modnyi magazin* as a women’s journal and thus reverse the focus: I analyse, first and foremost, the magazine’s rhetoric about the social peripherality of its readers, as women, while also considering how the coverage of this issue was intertwined with discussing their position as Russians. Furthermore, in contrast to the previous chapter, I study herein not only Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s individual standpoint but the discourse that was collectively formed under her editorship by the magazine’s multiple contributors. In this way, these two chapters complement one another by bringing up different aspects of *Modnyi magazin*’s complex and arguably coherent agenda and rhetoric on femininity.

Historical context: the woman question, intellectuals, and the periodical press

The decades when Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei published and edited *Modnyi magazin* coincided in time with broad public debates on and social responses to women’s emancipation. By the early 1860s, when *Modnyi magazin* came into existence, the so-called ‘woman question’ (or discussions about the social role, education, rights and duties of women) became an integral part of public debates. This question was raised in the context of the overall socio-economic transformation of the country. Following the disastrous defeat of the Russian Empire in the Crimean War, the new tsar Alexander II (1855-1881) initiated large-scale liberal reforms aimed at modernizing the country. The so-called Era of Great Reforms (1855 to mid-1860s) was marked by the general liberalization of the public domain: in order to benefit from the contributions of intellectuals and writers, the traditionally severe censorship was temporarily loosened. In these years, relative freedom of speech allowed the journalists and literati to raise and discuss different social problems. Among the ‘burning’ issues of the time raised by the intelligentsia was the reconsideration of women’s social role and education. Doctor and educator Nikolai Pirogov (1810-1881), economist Mariia Vernadskaja (1831-1860), and radical writer Mikhail Mikhailov (1829-1865) expressed

their ideas, each from his or her own perspective, in regards to broadening opportunities for women to partake in public life. They formatively contributed to establishing the woman question ‘as a major item in the ideological constellation of the Russian intelligentsia’.⁵⁰⁴ The literature of the early 1860s also marked the emergence of the first contemporary role models to embody the new female ideals. Two novels, Ivan Turgenev’s *On the Eve* (1860) and Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s *What is To Be Done?* (1863), were major literary responses to the woman question. Their female protagonists actively sought the practical application of their forces beyond the purely domestic domain and family circle. As a result, as argued by Barbara Clements, ‘The ‘woman question’, as the discussion of reforms for women was called across Europe, was now on the agenda of the Russian intelligentsia’.⁵⁰⁵

Renowned researcher of the Russian women’s liberation movement, Richard Stites dates the woman question from 1855 till 1881, during which time it was ‘taking shape first as a limited probe into the problem of improving education for women, and later amplifying into a full-scale anthropological discussion of woman’s particular genius and destiny’.⁵⁰⁶ According to Stites, by the early 1880’s the woman question was ‘resolved’ in the sense that, from its beginning as a controversial issue raised by progressive circles, it became such a broadly acknowledged part of the social agenda that ‘the age of the ‘woman question’ was over; it had received so much publicity during the 1860s and 1870s that there was nothing more to say about it as a general problem’.⁵⁰⁷ In the decades that followed, the struggle for women's rights in Russia was gradually consolidating into a social movement, which became distinctly politicized circa 1905, having taking advantage of the overall pre-revolutionary intensification of the socio-political processes in the Empire.⁵⁰⁸ Therefore, the basis for the Russian women’s movement was developed in the 1860s-1870s.

According to Stites, ‘the years of 1860-1861 were a turning point: an end of incubation and a beginning of application’ for women’s emancipation in Russia.⁵⁰⁹ In other words, this moment signified the transition from theoretical debates to the first steps towards altering women’s marginal social position. While the most general line of division ran between the proponents and the opponents of women’s emancipation (with the latter being exemplified by the conservatives

⁵⁰⁴ Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton University press, 1991), 38.

⁵⁰⁵ Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Bloomington (Ind.): Indiana University Press, 2012), 110.

⁵⁰⁶ Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement*, 30.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 159.

⁵⁰⁸ See Clements, *History of Women in Russia*; Linda Edmondson, ‘Feminism and Equality in an Authoritarian State: The Politics of Women’s Liberations in Late Imperial Russia,’ In *Women’s Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century. A European Perspective*, ed. by Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 221- 239.

⁵⁰⁹ Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement*, 47.

and, largely, the government), in the following decades the actual 'woman question' in Russia consisted not solely of *whether* women's condition had to change but primarily the degree, goals, and means of such change. As the approaches to these questions varied, the issue provoked sharp discrepancies among the supporters of women's liberation themselves, and received, as argued by Stites, three major responses embodied by feminism, nihilism, and radicalism.⁵¹⁰ The proponents of each of those standpoints shared a conviction toward the need to emancipate Russian women, but differed in their understanding of its objective and place within the far-reaching social transformation of the Empire. Thus, for the nihilists and the radicals, women's emancipation constituted just one among multiple components of an all-encompassing transformation of Russian society. Nihilism was a prominent phenomenon of Russian socio-cultural life of the 1860s, the representatives of which, both male and female, proclaimed their disobedience to all social formalities and, in particular, understood women's emancipation as 'total liberation from the yoke of the traditional family'.⁵¹¹ Nihilism was a worldview and a way of life, liberating and attractive and, thus, provoking the appearance of many 'poseurs', or false nihilists.⁵¹² However, its proponents did not form an organized movement and, at the end of the 1860s, either joined the radicals or returned to a mainstream lifestyle. The radicals were among the most prominent intellectuals of the time and, as suggested by their name, developed ideas in regards to the total transformation of society through the socialist revolution. Although they regarded women as completely equal to men, women's liberation was clearly and indisputably subordinated to the liberation of the 'people'. Therefore, for radicals, the woman question formed but a part of the political and revolutionary tasks of their generation. In sharp contrast to both nihilists and radicals, feminists did not pursue any broad socio-political or philosophical objectives and regarded the broadening of women's opportunities as the goal in itself:

Feminists searched for solutions within the framework of the Russian social system, accepted its basic assumptions, and, though wishing to change this or that aspect of it, refrained from suggesting its total renovation or reorganization. Their outlook was liberal and moderate; their goal was the gradual, peaceful, and legal reform of the status of women, particularly their economic and educational position.⁵¹³

Although Russian women themselves have never called themselves 'feminists', contemporary researchers (Stites, Edmondson, Clements, Iukina, Pushkareva) find this term the

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 63.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, 113.

⁵¹² Ibid, 105.

⁵¹³ Ibid, 64.

most appropriate for describing the nature of their standpoint and activities in the second half of the nineteenth century. These women were advocating for women, focused on women's well-being, and demanding the broadening of women's opportunities in regards to education and participation in the socio-economic life of the Empire. The first Russian feminists were 'the moderate, reforming activists in the self-styled women's movement',⁵¹⁴ primarily educated women from gentry and middle-class backgrounds, who concentrated their efforts on two main topics: advocating for women's education and supporting the poor, particularly women. The main leaders of this emerging movement were the 'big three': Anna Filosofova, Maria Tubnikova, and Nadezhda Stasova. As pointed out by Clements, 'In the 1860s, Filosofova, Stasova, Trubnikova, and thousands of other feminists in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and several provincial cities concentrated on helping poor urban women and improving education for girls'.⁵¹⁵ As I have discussed in Chapter One, the editor of *Modnyi magazin*, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, was one of these women, and, as this chapter will demonstrate, her social position found expression in the agenda of the journal.

These women were active cultural mediators, or transformers of the socio-cultural norms, both in regards to gender ideals and Russian culture. Although focused on the Russian context, they were open to and curious about their Western counterparts and, as evidenced by Edmondson, sought personal and institutional contacts with them. Edmondson points out that the ideas and activities of Russian feminists were informed by the complex interplay of external influences and domestic politics in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century'.⁵¹⁶ Their agenda was thus informed by both intellectual debates in Russia and the emerging women's movement in the West. On the one hand, Chernyshevskiy's *Chto Delat'?* ['What Is to Be Done?'] had a formative impact on all the participants of the debates on women's emancipation, regardless of their ideological standpoint. According to Stites, '[t]o the feminists, it reinforced their ideas on education and economic independence and on the moral imperative of helping other women struggle for these things'.⁵¹⁷ This sums up the main components of the early feminist response to the woman question.

On the other hand, Stites argues that the 'governing ideological assumptions' and basic premises of Russian feminists were based on Western, particularly British liberal and early feminist, thought: 'the feminist solution was classically liberal, deriving unconsciously from the

⁵¹⁴ Edmondson, 'Feminism and Equality', 230.

⁵¹⁵ Clements, *History of Women in Russia*, 116.

⁵¹⁶ Edmondson, 'Feminism and Equality', 234.

⁵¹⁷ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 65.

eighteenth-century English Whig tradition of liberalizing from the top and slowly spreading the benefits of reform down the social ladder'.⁵¹⁸ Russian scholar of the Russian women's movement Natalia Pushkareva also argues that the aspirations and beliefs of Russian feminists were similar to those in the countries of the West, specifically in their focus on education and free choice of occupation as a way of broadening their civil rights.⁵¹⁹ In addition, Lindenmeyr points out that feminist philanthropy of the second half of the century emerged at the intersections of 'the traditional Russian approach to giving and 'rational' European methods'.⁵²⁰ Feminists initiatives, on the one hand, transformed the traditional Orthodox understanding of charity as almsgiving, while, on the other, adapted the Western model of philanthropy to address 'more specifically Russian social and economic conditions and concerns'.⁵²¹ In all these ways, Russian feminists acted as cultural mediators, addressed the marginal social status of Russian women, and simultaneously affiliated them to their Western counterparts.

Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei was the only Russian feminists to publish and edit her own periodical publication.⁵²² In light of the socio-historical context of the period, I will focus, in this chapter, on analysing the standpoint of her publication, *Modnyi magazin*, in regards to the woman question and its unfolding in the 1860s-1870s. Most particularly, I study how the journal under Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's editorship negotiated Russian women's double peripherality by covering the woman question from the feminist standpoint. The chapter studies the magazine's rhetoric over twenty years and examines the ways in which it engaged with contemporary national and international polemics. I consecutively discuss aspects of the woman question from general to specific, reflecting the chronological evolution of the woman question and the magazine's focus: the goals of women's emancipation, women's access to higher education and paid employment, and, finally, organized feminist philanthropy as a practical solution to the woman question. The argumentation is based on the close reading of articles published in the literary section of *Modnyi magazin* throughout twenty years of publishing. Those were written by its editor, Sofia Mei, and the magazine's contributors – both male and female, permanent and occasional, published unsigned or under pseudonyms – and at times reprinted from other publications. As the magazine's authors commonly presented their opinions as those of the 'editorial board' [*redaktsiia*] or simply

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, 88.

⁵¹⁹ Natalia Pushkareva, 'Feminism in Russia: Two Centuries of History', in *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-communist Countries in the 19th and 20th centuries*, ed. by Elizabeth Frysak, Margareth Lanzinger, Edith Saurer (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), 365-383.

⁵²⁰ Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton university press, 1996), 141.

⁵²¹ Ibid, 140-41.

⁵²² Except for Evgeniia Konradi (1838-1898), who, in 1866, wrote for the journal *Zhenkii vestnik* and in 1868 edited the newspaper *Nedelia* [Week] (1866-1903), which, however, was not targeted at women.

of *Modnyi magazin*, I consider these materials the constitutive parts of the rhetoric generated by the magazine, while the focus is set on messages which were expressed regularly and consistently.

Three authors were particularly important for shaping the discursive framework of *Modnyi magazin* concerning the woman question: Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, Vsevolod Krestovskiy, and Sofia Voskresenskaia. The editor herself occasionally wrote articles which could thus be seen as programmatic since they expressed the general position of the magazine in regards to women's emancipation. Vsevolod Krestovskiy was a known literati of the time and the author of a social life feuilleton in the 1860s, which covered not only culture but also 'sad and dark sides of our social life, by which one could not pass silently, since they constitute maybe the most characteristic feature of this life, contemporary to us'.⁵²³ Sofia Voskresenskaia was the author of the column 'Letter to the Province [Письмо в провинцию], regularly published in *Modnyi magazin* in the first half of the 1870s. This column most regularly and systematically communicated the standpoint of the magazine. Voskresenskaia covered the practical aspects of the woman question: women's education, work, philanthropy, and social prejudices while also discussing Western developments in these domains. As was demonstrated in Chapter One, both Krestovskiy and Voskresenskaia belonged to Rekhnevskaja-Mei's social circle. Most probably, they were not only her colleagues but also like-minded friends, which determined their formative contribution to shaping the magazine's agenda. Other contributors were most commonly anonymous or wrote under pseudonyms.

⁵²³ Vsevolod Krestovskiy, 'Где что делается' [What is Going On and Where], *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, 61. [грустные и темные стороны нашей общественной жизни, пройти которые молчание нельзя, ибо они составляют чуть ли не самую характеристическую черту этой современной нам жизни].

Chapter 6: “The woman question as a general problem”: *Modnyi magazin*’s position in the debates

In its first years of publication, *Modnyi magazin*’s rhetoric reflected the overall optimistic and liberal spirit of the Russian public discourse of the early 1860s. From the very first issue of the magazine, the editorial staff directly announced its position as supportive of women’s emancipation and emphasized its ‘passionate sympathy’ to women’s development, the improvement of their lives, and the ‘affirmation of their human rights’.⁵²⁴ Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s article with the telling title ‘Emancipation of Women in Russia’ was published in the seventh issue of *Modnyi magazin* and can be seen as foundational programmatic material in regards to the editorial standpoint on this question. Women’s emancipation, together with the emancipation of serfs, was presented by the editor as ‘among the most exciting, the most urgent questions of modern educated society’.⁵²⁵ This standpoint corresponded to the perception of the historical moment by Russian women from the educated classes, as described by Stites: ‘Women sensitive to their status were quick to contrast the liberation of fifty million illiterate serfs [...] to their own lack of liberation’.⁵²⁶ The fundamental socio-economic changes signified for them the beginning of a new age and made them hope that ‘their aspirations for a wider role in life would find fulfilment in the near future’.⁵²⁷ In this respect, Linda Edmondson, a scholar of Russian gender and women’s history, suggests that Russian women’s comparison of their social status to that of the serfs before the Emancipation signified their awareness of ‘the asymmetry and the explicitly patriarchal structure of tsarist society’.⁵²⁸ Such awareness was clearly expressed in the pages of *Modnyi magazin*, as the author of a lengthy article called *A Woman about Women*, Nikolai Ivanov, argued: ‘The time of slavery is passing, the spirit of freedom is in the air, the necessity of education is realized by everyone and justice requires not to estrange women from this new movement’.⁵²⁹ Women’s emancipation was presented as one of the most vibrant and critical questions of ‘modern educated society’, provoking heated debates and contradictory opinions. In this regard, *Modnyi magazin*, positioning itself as a guide for Russian women in any area of their interest, at home and

⁵²⁴ Subscription announcement for 1863, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, no. 22. [утверждению за ними человеческих прав].

⁵²⁵ Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, ‘Эмансипация женщин в России’ [Emancipation of Women in Russia], *Modnyi magazin*, 160. [одни из самых занимательных, самых животрепещущих вопросов современного образованного общества].

⁵²⁶ Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement*, 49-50.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 50.

⁵²⁸ Linda Edmondson, review of *Русский феминизм как вызов современности* [Russian feminism as a challenge of modernity], by Irina Iukina, in *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 2, no. 3 (December 15, 2010): 226.

⁵²⁹ Nikolai Ivanov, ‘Женщина о женщинах’ [A Woman about Women], *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 383. [Время рабства проходит, со всех сторон веет духом свободы, везде сознается необходимость образования и справедливость требует не отчуждать женщин от этого нового движения].

in society, and was aimed at informing its female readers on this issue and encouraging them to develop their own opinions.

The term ‘woman question’ was frequently used in the pages of the magazine throughout the years, particularly in social life reviews and occasional featured articles dedicated to the issue. Although raised in the context of advocating for change, it was also presented as advancing and already delivering positive results. For instance, in 1872, Voskresenskaia noticed in ‘Letter to the Province’: ‘The woman question, for long taken by some people as an issue hardly worth serious attention or, even worse, only able to provoke mockery, acquires ever more supporters every day’.⁵³⁰ In 1876, an anonymous author of the social life column ‘Feuilleton sketches’ described how: ‘The woman question is starting to take shape more and more. The woman [of today] is beginning to gradually free herself from the narrow boundaries assigned to her’.⁵³¹ In 1881, an unsigned and untitled article about a provincial woman doctor started with the phrase: ‘The woman question from the domain of loud theoretical debates gradually descended to the ground of humble but successful practical application and is now being solved by itself, quietly, but in the most positive manner’.⁵³²

6.1 The feminist standpoint

Within the pro-women’s camp, *Modnyi magazin*’s rhetoric fully corresponded to the moderate reformist agenda of early Russian feminists. First of all, *Modnyi magazin* advocated for the need of a gradual and ‘reasonable’ improvement in women’s status as dictated by common sense and determined by the natural evolution of society. The moderate, liberal, and reformist feminist standpoint of *Modnyi magazin* was presented as ‘common sense’, self-evident for any member of ‘educated society’, not as a philosophical doctrine. Although the rhetoric was focused on the Russian context, developments in the Western world figured prominently in *Modnyi magazin*’s discussions about the woman question. Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s article on the emancipation of women in Russia begins with the presentation of liberation as a major modern trend and then focuses on the local context by describing how: ‘Rumours about women’s emancipation have reached us

⁵³⁰ Voskresenskaia, ‘Письмо в провинцию’ [Letter to the Province], *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 329. [Женский вопрос, так долго считавшийся иными людьми делом даже не достойным серьезного внимания или, хуже того, способным вызвать одни только насмешки, приобретает теперь с каждым днем более сторонников]

⁵³¹ ‘Фельетонные наброски’ [Feuilleton Sketches], *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 174. [Женский вопрос, таким образом, начинает все более обозначаться. Женщина начинает мало-помалу высвобождаться из рамок, ей предписанных. В добрый час!]

⁵³² Unsigned and untitled note, *Modnyi magazin*, 1881, 88. [«Женский вопрос» из сферы громких теоретических дебатов мало-помалу снизошел на почву скромного, но успешного практического применения, и теперь он решается сам собою тихо, исподволь, но самым положительным образом].

[Russians] as well'.⁵³³ According to the editor, 'these rumours' from abroad resulted in 'the largest segment of educated society, comprised of both men and women, demonstrat[ing] great sympathy and a readiness to serve the common cause [of women's emancipation], according to their might and ability'.⁵³⁴

Overall, women's emancipation was presented as an international process, related not to a particular country but to the 'enlightened' and 'educated' world, generally represented by the West. Therefore, the emancipation of Russian women was regarded in the overall pan-European context. Developments in the West frequently served as the point of reference for assessing progress in Russia: sometimes allowing for celebrating achievements but, most commonly, enabling authors to advocate for further reforms and outline the direction in which efforts should be directed. For example, a columnist observed: 'the Russian woman has freed herself from reclusion and acquired certain social weight later than other European women'.⁵³⁵ At the same time, another contributor claimed: 'The condition of the woman, willing to free herself from centuries-long prejudice and claim her independent existence, is far from being enviable, in Russia as well as in the West'.⁵³⁶ Accordingly, women's liberation was presented in the magazine as a long-term project of socio-cultural transformation, concerned in the first place with removing limitations that prevented women from leading meaningful lives.

Secondly, *Modnyi magazin*'s standpoint clearly reflected the feminists' prioritization of socio-cultural matters over legal, political, or philosophical ones. According to Pushkareva, 'Russian women were not so much confronted with the task of having a certain right of privilege to be recorded in legislation as making sure that the existing norms and regulations were actually implemented'.⁵³⁷ Accordingly, comparing the legal status of Russian women to those of their female compatriots abroad, Sofia Voskresenskaia argued:

⁵³³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Emancipation of Women in Russia', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 160. [Дошли слухи о женской эмансипации и до нас].

⁵³⁴ Ibid. [Большая половина образованного общества, как мужчины, так и женщины, показала большое сочувствие и готовность служить, по мере сил и возможности, общему делу].

⁵³⁵ Ivanov, 'A Woman About Women', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 367. [Русская женщина позже других европейских женщин освободилась от затворничества и приобрела некоторое общественное значение].

⁵³⁶ 'Feuilleton Sketches', *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 142. [Положение женщины, желающей освободиться от вековых предрассудков, и заявить свое самостоятельное существование далеко незавидно, как у нас, так и на западе. Большинство все еще привыкло смотреть на женщину, как на нечто прилагательное к мужчине, без которого она ничего не представляет. Мы, впрочем, в отношении женского вопроса опередили запад; у нас женщина все-таки пользуется большей самостоятельностью и в последнее время почти немислимы браки, устраиваемые родителями, помимо согласия невесты, как это сплошь и рядом делается на Западе и преимущественно во Франции].

⁵³⁷ Pushkareva, *Russian Feminism*, 370.

In general, civic rights of women in Russia are much broader than in other countries, although our 'woman question' needs to fight against the custom and public opinion. But even these two conservative perspectives begin to cede, step by step, as they are confronted by an influx of new, more rational and humane ideas.⁵³⁸

In particular, in her programmatic article, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei pointed to socio-cultural prejudice and misogynist traditions as the primary obstacles to women's emancipation: '*Forty years old -- her tale is told* [Сорок лет – бабий век] – this saying in the best way to define the social status of a Russian woman and the degree of men's respect toward her.'⁵³⁹ This old Russian saying refers to a woman's reproductive age; thus, Mei's article boldly criticized an underlying traditional belief which reduced the very value of a woman's life to her biological ability to give birth.

Thirdly, despite the fact that women's liberation was presented in the magazine as an inherent and necessary next step in the progress of Russian society at large, *Modnyi magazin's* reasoning was particularly marked by the focus on women's own happiness and well-being. The overall goal of women's liberation as understood by the magazine was articulated by Rekhnevskaja-Mei in her article on emancipation: 'Emancipation should come to women's aid, should extend their age, allow them to live not for forty years but for as long as their moral forces will serve them.'⁵⁴⁰ For instance, a popular contemporary argument for widening women's freedom to work was an economic one, according to which the national economy would benefit significantly from women's participation in the labour market. While this reasoning was neither refuted nor excluded from the magazine's rhetoric, *Modnyi magazin* primarily discussed how women themselves would benefit from emancipation.

Finally, while the role attributed to women in patriarchal Russian society was presented as unnatural, artificial, and based on the discriminating assumptions of women's inferiority, it was also claimed to be women's own responsibility to become aware of and transform this situation. For example, discussing the above-mentioned Russian saying on the short lifespan of women's usefulness to society, Rekhnevskaja-Mei encouraged her readers to question their internalized prejudices and admit their own responsibility in this respect: 'This saying was well-known to all

⁵³⁸ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 42. [вообще, гражданские права женщин в России гораздо обширнее нежели в других странах, и «женскому вопросу» приходится бороться у нас с обычаем и общественным мнением. Но и эти два упорные консерватора начинают уступать, мало-помалу, перед наплывом новых, более рациональных и гуманных идей].

⁵³⁹ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Emancipation of women in Russia', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 160. ['Сорок лет – бабий век', как нельзя лучше определяет общественное положение русской женщины и степень уважения к ней мужчин].

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid. [Эмансипация должна прийти женщинам на помощь, должна продлить их век, позволить им жить не сорок лет, а столько, на сколько послужат им их нравственные силы].

Russian women; however, they had never resented it but admitted, with a blunt and lazy humility, its unquestionable rightness. – As if it is supposed to be this way.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, another columnist argued: ‘Common sense can tell women that they are no worse than men, that they have the same right of freedom, of work, of self-improvement, as men’.⁵⁴² The crucial objective behind this typically feminist call was to empower women by helping them become aware of their potential as agents of social change, both as individual actors and as contributors to collective effort. The practical outcomes and the importance of this argument for the formation of the Russian women’s liberation movement is discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter.

6.2 Between the conservatives and the radicals

The magazine’s editor and contributors took a critical stand vis-à-vis the conservative point of view, which suggested the preservation of the historical customs (such as the traditional women’s role) and the maintenance of the status quo. This standpoint was accused in the magazine as retrograde and incompatible with the demands of the time, both socio-economic and ethical. The new post-Emancipation time, praised by the magazine, required the uplifting of women’s status and the equation of their rights and freedoms with those of men. For instance, in 1873, Voskresenskaia argued that the ideas of Christianity were often misused and misinterpreted by the conservatives with an attempt to prevent the natural evolution of society and women’s role within it:

The position of women in family and society, which attracts more and more attention and the interest of all progressive thinkers, is discussed very one-sidedly, and often completely wrong, by people from the camp which regard every attempt to eradicate any abnormality, as if it were only consecrated years ago, as an attempt to overthrow the current order of things in its entirety. At the same time, these people, like all who feel that their own arguments are quite shaky, are trying to put forward the authority of sacred persons or institutions; any disagreement with this would be irrelevant and disrespectful. So many times the Christian doctrine – this doctrine full of love and justice, in addition to its divine significance – has served as a shield for thoughts completely opposed to its very spirit!⁵⁴³

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. [Поговорку эту знали все русские женщины, но не возмущались ею, и признавали, с тупым и ленивым смирением, несомненную ее справедливость. – Как будто так и быть должно].

⁵⁴² Ivanov, ‘A Woman about Women’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 495. [рассудок, разумеется здравый, может сказать женщинам, что они ничуть не хуже мужчин, что они имеют такое же право на свободу, на деятельность, на усовершенствование, как и мужчины].

⁵⁴³ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 105. [Положение женщины в семье и обществе, возбуждающее более и более внимание и участие всех передовых мыслителей, обсуждается крайне односторонне, а часто и совершенно превратно людьми того лагеря, который видит в каждой попытке к

In this context, although the magazine almost never touched upon religion, *Voskresenskaia* informed her readers about a book called *Rights and Meaning of a Woman in Christianity* [Права и значения женщины в христианстве], arguing that it was a rare case of the casting of modern light on the woman question ‘from the purely Christian point of view’ [с чисто христианской точки зрения]. The columnist pointed out that the author traced the role of the woman in Christianity over centuries and presented a convincing argument that ‘she was consistently taken for an individual person, and not absorbed by a male element. The opposite view emerged only afterwards, under the influence of different external conditions’.⁵⁴⁴ Thus, the conservative standpoint, of which the retroactive misinterpretation (but not religion itself) was a part, was inalterably accused in the magazine as incompatible with both the socio-economic and ethical demands of the ‘new time’, requiring the transformation of a woman’s status in family and society. This latter view implied, according to the magazine, the development of women’s capacities, claiming their equality to men, and viewing women as full-fledged members of socio-political, cultural, and economic life. Discussing the traditional conditions of women in the international context, the feuilletonist pointed out:

The majority [of people] is still accustomed to looking at a woman as complementary [прилагательное] to a man, without whom she does not represent anything. We [Russians], however, have outpaced the West in regards to the woman question; in Russia women still enjoy greater independence, and, recently, marriages arranged by parents, without the consent of a bride, have become almost unthinkable, though they are done all the time in the West and particularly in France.⁵⁴⁵

Interestingly enough, while France and Paris were recognized as the ultimate leaders in regards to fashion, *Modnyi magazin*’s rhetoric was dramatically different when it came to the woman

искоренению какой-либо ненормальности, если она только освящена давностью лет, поползновение к ниспровержению всякого существующего порядка. При этом, люди эти, как все, чувствующие свои собственные доводы довольно шаткими, стараются выставить вперед авторитет лиц или учреждений священных, спор против которых был бы неуместным и непочтительным. Так, сколько раз христианское учение – это учение, полное любви и справедливости, помимо его божественного значения, служило щитом для мыслей самых противных его духу].

⁵⁴⁴ *Voskresenskaia*, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 105. [она постоянно принималась за личность индивидуальную, а не поглощенную мужским элементом. Противоположное воззрение явилось только уже впоследствии, под влиянием разных внешних условий, но было одним искажением справедливых и полных любви принципов христианского учения, а никак не его сущностью].

⁵⁴⁵ ‘Feuilleton sketches’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 142. [Положение женщины, желающей освободиться от вековых предрассудков, и заявить свое самостоятельное существование далеко незавидно, как у нас, так и на западе. Большинство все еще привыкло смотреть на женщину, как на нечто прилагательное к мужчине, без которого она ничего не представляет. Мы, впрочем, в отношении женского вопроса опередили запад; у нас женщина все-таки пользуется большей самостоятельностью и в последнее время почти немислимы браки, устраиваемые родителями, помимо согласия невесты, как это сплошь и рядом делается на Западе и преимущественно во Франции].

question. Although the West, including France, was depicted as the progressive model for Russia, France was presented as backward regarding the situation of women, while England and the United States, in contrast, were praised for being the world's frontrunners. Germany was also frequently referenced and presented as the country where the woman question was 'considered seriously: and, if some particular details are challenged, these are done with due respect for the principle itself'.⁵⁴⁶

Another remarkable article that questioned the restrictions imposed on women by European societies and traditional upbringing was a long critical review of the popular book *Le Livre des Femmes* (The Book of Women), written in 1860 by French journalist and writer Comtesse Dash. It was an advice book for women on how to conduct themselves in society and at home which was reprinted across Europe and became very popular among women in different countries, including Russia. The detailed and passionate review was signed by 'Nikolai Ivanov' and consisted of three parts which were published in subsequent issues of *Modnyi magazin*. It began with a comparative overview of the evolution of the woman's role in European societies and then discussed in detail the arguments presented by Comtesse Dash. On the one hand, this article was an attempt to combat established stereotypes which, according to the author, were deeply shared by many of his contemporaries, as indicated in his quotation from Dash: "We are women and thus created for suffering", claims Comtesse Dash. Why does the author conclude that women are created for suffering? Do not these sufferings stem from the unnatural position of a woman?'.⁵⁴⁷ On the other hand, Ivanov used the article as an occasion to discuss the ideational underpinning of the woman question which, according to the overall standpoint of *Modnyi magazin*, challenged society to 'abandon its prejudices, change its view of a woman and accept her as a full and equal member'.⁵⁴⁸

As an alternative to the views of Comtesse Dash and other conservatives, the magazine offered its readers the ideas of the brightest minds of the time, e.g. John Stuart Mill and Victor Hugo, who expressed their belief in and respect for women's intellectual, moral, and practical abilities. For example Ivanov, discussing the role of a wife, referred to the example of Mill's wife Harriet Taylor, praised her for being the thinker's closest intellectual ally and expressed the hope that Russian women would 'open their heads for serious and useful knowledge and become for

⁵⁴⁶ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 249. [поставлен на серьезную почву: и если оспаривается в некоторых частностях, то с должным уважением к самому принципу]

⁵⁴⁷ Ivanov, 'A Woman about Women', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 374. ["Мы женщины и созданы для страдания», говорит графиня Даш. Из чего же заключает автор, что женщины созданы для страдания? Не происходят ли эти страдания от неестественности положения женщины?"]

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 503. [отказалось от своих предрассудков, изменило свой взгляд на женщину и приняло ее в свою среду, как полноправного члена].

their husbands what Mrs. Mill was for hers'.⁵⁴⁹ Mill was mentioned in the magazine particularly often. For instance, in 1871, Sofia Voskresenskaia discussed Mill's 'remarkable speech' on women's access to voting and the need to provide them with political and social responsibilities.⁵⁵⁰ Two years later she discussed his death as 'a bitter loss for the educated world'⁵⁵¹ and summarized his contribution in the following phrase:

Without ever being carried away by those extremes which sometimes extend to some supporters of women's rights, he was one of the first to raise his voice against that discrimination to which women are subjected. One can unmistakably say that the passionate and reasonable arguments of Mill served, more than any other, at least in England, to the favourable turn of public opinion in favour of the woman question.⁵⁵²

This reasoning, too, emphasized the general conviction of the magazine's editorial staff that the liberal reformist approach was the most efficient way for achieving a sustainable change of public opinion.

At the same time, while advocating women's emancipation, *Modnyi magazin* decisively stood against 'quasi-emancipation', or the vulgarized understanding of liberation which exaggerated the form without adhering to the principle. In her programmatic article, Rekhnevskaja-Mei described this phenomenon and clearly presented her editorial standpoint in regards to it:

The more one thinks about women's emancipation, the more firmly one realizes the difficulties of this task. – Some Russian ladies treated it not so incredulously. Without examining in depth the subject that, in their opinion, is not at all puzzling or meriting a serious reflection, they, with a self-assurance characteristic for semi-educated people, decided to simplify it and [thus] solve the problem. Having translated the word 'emancipation' as 'obscenity', these ladies have turned themselves into some kind of ugly type, estranged from the feminine, and vaguely reminiscent of men of bad society, and called themselves 'emancipated women'. [...] In decent women, these ladies instilled a deep

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 474. [открыли свои головки для серьезных и полезных знаний и были бы для своих мужей тем же, чем г-жа Милль была для своего].

⁵⁵⁰ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 42.

⁵⁵¹ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 169. [образованный мир понес горькую утрату в лице Дж. Ст. Милля]

⁵⁵² Ibid. [Не увлекаясь никогда теми крайностями, до которых доходят иные защитники женских прав, он был одним из первых, возвысившихся голос против тех притеснений, которым подвержены женщины. Можно безошибочно сказать, что горячие и разумные доводы Милля послужили более всяких других, по крайней мере, в Англии, к благоприятному повороту общественного мнения в пользу женского вопроса].

disgust: the emancipated woman became a disgraceful name – women are ashamed of it, men laugh at it. [...] No one has ever portrayed a quasi-emancipated woman so masterfully as Turgenev in his new work, *Fathers and Sons*.⁵⁵³

This was followed by a lengthy extract from Ivan Turgenev's novel depicting its female character, Evdoksia Kukshina. While the author himself did not use the term, this character presented 'an unflattering caricature'⁵⁵⁴ of a nihilist woman, summarized by Stites in the following way: 'She is beyond George Sand ('a backward woman, knows nothing about education or embryology') and correctly denounces Proudhon, but in the same breath praises [misogynist] Michelet's *L'amour!*'⁵⁵⁵ While this exaggeratedly ridiculous character provoked varied reactions at the time, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's interpretation of Kukshina resembled the assessment of the revolutionary democrat Dmitry Pisarev (1840-1868), who pointed out that 'her counterparts in real life were not nihilists, but "false nihilists" and "false emancipées"'.⁵⁵⁶ In a similar way, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, opposing not female nihilists but quasi-emancipated women, argued that 'such women should be seen as a public evil: they vulgarize, distort the noblest of undertakings and slow down moral development'.⁵⁵⁷ In this way, the editor differentiated the reformist ideas propounded by her magazine from the interpretation of emancipation which allowed women to ignore all social conventions of polite society. The reasoning behind such a categorical position was that the eccentric behaviour of 'false emancipées', which, according to Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, discredited the very notion of women's liberation and, as a result, provoked reactionary tendencies in society and facilitated the maintenance of conservative attitudes towards the woman question.

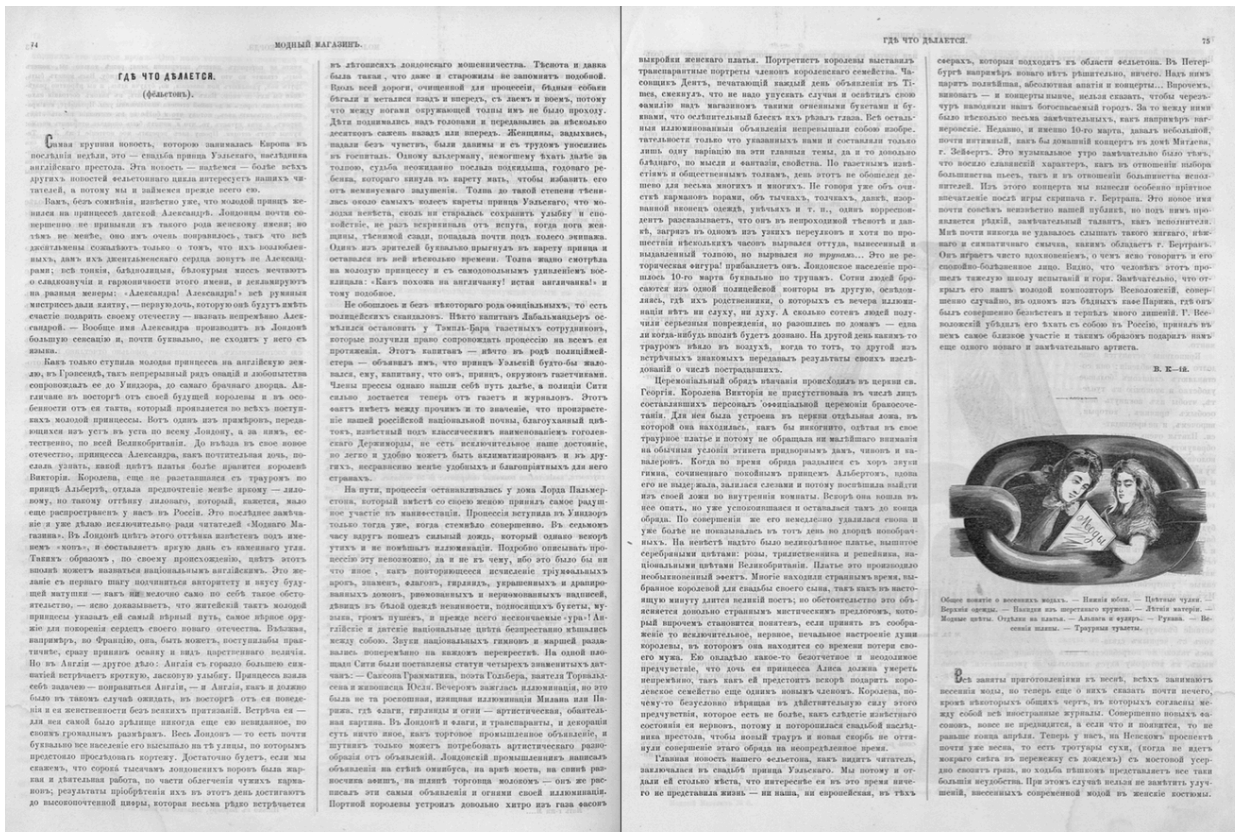
⁵⁵³ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Emancipation of Women in Russia', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 161. [Чем больше кто думал о женской эмансипации, тем тверже утверждался в трудности этой задачи. – Не так недоверчиво отнеслись к ней некоторые русские дамы. Не углубляясь в предмет, по их мнению, вовсе не головоломный и не заслуживающий серьезных размышлений, они, со свойственно полубразованным людям самонадеянностью, взялись упростить его и разрешить задачу. Переведя слово эмансипация непристойностью, дамы эти выработали из себя какой-то уродливый тип, отдалившийся от женского, и смутно напоминающий мужчин дурного общества, и назвали себя эмансипированными женщинами. [...] Порядочным женщинами дамы эти внушили глубокое отвращение: эмансипированная женщина сделалась названием позорным – женщины стыдятся его, мужчины поднимают на смех. [...] Никто не изобразил так искусно лже-эмансипированную женщину, как Тургенев в новом своем произведении «Отцы и дети»].

⁵⁵⁴ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 102.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Emancipation of Women in Russia', *Modnyi magazin*, 160. [таких женщин надо преследовать, как общественное зло: оно опошливает, извращает самые благие начинания и останавливают нравственное развитие].



Modnyi magazin, 1865, no. 8. A social life review by Vsevolod Krestovskiy followed by a fashion report by Sofia Rekhnevskaya-Mei

References to Turgenev's Kukshina were commonplace in the magazine's rhetoric and allowed its editorial staff to implicitly articulate its own standpoint. For instance, Vsevolod Krestovskiy argued that in Russia, Western trends and phenomena were commonly 'painted with (how could it be without!) a known colouring of vulgarity [пошлости] and disgrace'.⁵⁵⁸ Referring to one of 'our emancipated' ladies from the 'endearing type of Evdoksiiyas Kukshiny' (plural of 'Evdoksiia Kukshina') [достолюбезная порода Евдоксий Кукшиных], he clarified his position:

In Russia, unfortunately, there are too many women who understand emancipation as the total freedom to do any possible disgrace. [...] Misses Kukshiny [the plural of Kukshina] need, first of all, dirt, negligence, and nakedness, impudent if theirs frank cynicism. [...] Regarding emancipation in a sense of civil rights, in a sense of fair women's labour, these ladies do not even think.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁸ Vsevolod Krestovskiy, 'What is Going On and Where', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 526. [окрасился (как без этого!) известным колоритом пошлости и безобразия].

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. [У нас, к сожалению, слишком много женщин, понимающих эмансипацию как полную свободу делать какие-угодно безобразия [...] Г-жам Кукшиным, прежде всего, нужны грязь, неряшество и голый, наглый своею откровенностью цинизм. [...] Об эмансипации в смысле прав гражданских, в смысле женского честного труда, эти барыни и не помышляют].

Sofia Voskresenskaia addressed those positions which ignored the reasonable midway arguments and exaggerated their own standpoints to the extreme: On the one hand, the caricature of conservatism considered as part of the woman question ‘all possible violations of order and morals and the shaking of all essential foundations of family and civil welfare’⁵⁶⁰. On the other, however, the caricature of emancipation considered that ‘every affair has its own feeble-minded, its hypocrites, its fanatics. [...] The same is true with the woman question: why point to Kukshiny or those fanatics – for not at all fearsome – who, in their demands, transcend even the physical limits of the possible?’⁵⁶¹

Furthermore, *Modnyi magazin* directly expressed its opposition to the radicals a few times: when defending the moderate reformist approach, it opposed any anti-systemic or illegal ends or means. For example, in 1881 an unsigned article called ‘Nihilism in Russia’ (a partly from an article translated from the French newspaper *Figaro*) discussed ‘the birth and development of this harmful sect’ [зарождение и развитие этой вредной секты] in Russia. The Russian article, most probably penned by Rekhnevskaja-Mei, discussed how educated young women from the lower social classes (‘daughters of poor, uneducated parents’) as a group were particularly perceptible to radical ideas. The popularity of nihilism among young Russians was presented as the result of the conflicting nature of their lives: the combination of poor living conditions at home and a broad but unsystematic education acquired at the gymnasium which provoked in them a disdain for their parents’ lifestyle, on the one hand, and the general unpreparedness for practical life and limited opportunities to apply these strengths outside of marriage, on the other. As a result, such girls became an easy target for ‘the leaders of the revolutionary parties’: ‘She joyfully gives her life away to the task of propaganda, a life which is not worth valuing, since it does not give her anything bright’.⁵⁶² Although this article talked about ‘nihilism’, in fact it addressed radicalism. While presenting it as a profoundly destructive phenomenon, *Modnyi magazin* nonetheless provided convincing explanations for why Russian girls from socially vulnerable classes were particularly receptive to it and used it to argue for the need to reform women’s conditions, primarily education and employment opportunities.

Distinguishing themselves from quasi-emancipators, nihilists, as well as radicals, not only expressed an editorial standpoint but also fulfilled an important strategic function. Both the

⁵⁶⁰ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 249. [всякое нарушение порядка и нравственности, и потрясение всех необходимейших основ семейного и гражданского благоденствия].

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. [В каждом деле бывают свои слабые умы, свои лицемеры, свои фанатики. [...] Тоже и в женском вопросе: зачем указывать нам на Кукшиных или на тех фанатиков – впрочем, далеко не грозных – которые в своих требованиях переступают даже за физические пределы возможного?]

⁵⁶² ‘Нигилизм в России’ [Nihilism in Russia], *Modnyi magazin*, 1881, 55. [Она с радостью отдает свою жизнь делу пропаганды, жизнь, которую не стоит дорожить, так как она не дает ничего светлого].

caricature of emancipation and radical ideas were perceived by the general public as either ridiculous or dangerous phenomena that threatened traditional values and were leading to unpredictable socio-cultural consequences. By claiming vulgarization as well as radicalization of liberal emancipatory ideas as deviating from the main purpose of women's liberation, *Modnyi magazin* presented women's emancipation as a serious long-term project, indispensable for further social progress, but also complex and controversial, requiring profound changes on both ideational and practical levels. In line with this standpoint, the magazine's editorial staff developed a midway position among the margins of the conservative, 'vulgar' and revolutionary standpoints on this question. In her article 'The End of Upbringing', Rekhnevskaja-Mei presented an image of 'a reasonable woman – a woman in the full sense of the word – [who] understands that she has to know all the details related to the improvement of the material side of life while, at the same time, occupying herself with and being interested in social issues, which have in their foundation the reasonable emancipation of women'.⁵⁶³ The editor argued that young women needed to develop both their intellectual abilities and practical skills, which together would allow them to lead active, respectable, and meaningful lives regardless of the circumstances they might find themselves in: married or single, wealthy or limited in means. Rekhnevskaja-Mei's key argument was that women themselves had to take the responsibility for further developing and broadening the knowledge acquired in gymnasium or at home: 'neither practical skills nor intellectual culture is acquired in a day: one needs a lot of character, sobriety, and perseverance in order to erect a building, the foundation of which was laid by the upbringing. Aren't we thus right when we argue that the end of upbringing is the beginning of it?'⁵⁶⁴ In this way, *Modnyi magazin* presented its female readers with an image of a modern femininity that merged traditions with emancipation. Indeed, *Modnyi magazin*'s midway standpoint between conservatism and radicalism determined the character of its rhetoric on the most discussed aspects of the woman question: access to education and labour.

⁵⁶³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'The End of Upbringing', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 192. [Разумная женщина – женщина в полном смысле этого слова, - понимает, что она должна знать все детали касающиеся улучшение материальной стороны жизни, в то же время, занимаясь и интересуясь социальными вопросами, имеющими в своем основании разумную эмансипацию женщин].

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. [ни практические знания, ни умственная культура в один день не даются: нужно много твердости, рассудительности и настойчивости, чтобы воздвигнуть здание, основание которого положено воспитанием. Не правы ли мы, утверждая, что конец воспитания есть начало его?].

Chapter 7: Women's education and labour: local and international debates

Already by the early 1860s and for subsequent decades, debates on whether (and to what extent) women's social status should be altered in Russia were centered around the question of women's education. For Russian feminists, access to education was directly related to the broadening of women's opportunities in socio-economic life and, thus, were seen as the first step towards negotiating their marginalized social position. As summarized by Pushkareva, 'Aspiring for civil and political rights to be granted to them, the first Russian feminists viewed education and free choice of occupation as the means to obtain these rights'.⁵⁶⁵ This united them with their counterparts in the West, and *Modnyi magazin* presented a campaign to advocate for the improvement of women's education as an international trend, equally actual for Russia as for Europe and the United States. The materials on these topics were both informative and analytical, thus discussing different points of view on this international trend. In this way, *Modnyi magazin* addressed the arguments raised by both proponents and opponents of the expansion of women's opportunities, thus offering its female readers food for thought.

7.1 Women's education

Since the very beginning, *Modnyi magazin* regularly informed its readers on developments regarding women's access to higher education (primarily medicine and natural sciences, and later law, economics, and history), both in the Russian Empire and abroad. One of the first issues of the magazine in 1862 published a separate article on the admission of women to the University of Kiev. In the course of the subsequent twenty years, it followed developments in the field of women's access to public education. In 1872, Voskresenskaia claimed: 'In our magazine, we have often told of the admission of women to some European and American universities and of the opening of different special women's lower and higher schools'.⁵⁶⁶ The magazine indeed reported on the growing presence of female students at the universities of Kiev, Warsaw, Gottingen, Zurich, Edinburgh, and Cornell, and celebrated the opening of women's higher courses, technical schools and seminaries in Russia, France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, and the United States. The questions of women's education was also often raised in social feuilletons, thus following the pattern introduced in the 1860s by Krestovskiy, who discussed the woman question as part of social life. For example, in 1876, a reviewer noticed that 'recently, articles on women's higher

⁵⁶⁵ Pushkareva, 'Feminism in Russia', 367.

⁵⁶⁶ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 329. [В нашем журнале говорилось уже не раз о допущении женщин в некоторые европейские и американские университеты и об открытии разных специальных женских низших и высших школ].

education have appeared in the press more and more often'.⁵⁶⁷ This was followed by a description of the women's higher school at the Cracow Industrial and Technical Museum, which was funded by a patron, Mr. Baranetskiy, to provide Polish women, especially those of modest means, with an opportunity to acquire a full-fledged degree. In 1877, another reviewer, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Domino', discussed, between news on the theater and literature in Russia and abroad, a project for women's education initiated in Finland. This project consisted of the organization of a special commission made up of representatives from the 'scientific strata' [ученое сословие] to realize a detailed plan on engaging women in acquiring higher and technical education. After pointing out the excitement which this project provoked among Finish ladies, the reviewer concluded: 'These, at least, are not words, words and words, as Hamlet said, but the facts. One should still think about the situation of a woman in our society who still occupies such an unenviable place'.⁵⁶⁸

Modnyi magazin frequently referred to developments in the West as points of reference in discussions on Russian women's education. Progress in regards to women's education was equated to the progress in women's emancipation itself. For instance, Voskresenskaia concluded: 'In Europe, the movement in favor of women could be called general, since even those persons who stand against some of the demands of the radical supporters of women admit, nonetheless, the former's equality of rights in the domain of education'.⁵⁶⁹ The women's struggle to gain access to higher education was presented as an international trend, in which American and British women took the lead: 'In the United States, as well as in England, women gradually begin to realize the usefulness and necessity of higher education and little by little free themselves from the net of prejudices, with which they were bound'.⁵⁷⁰ In 1872, the magazine published a series of unsigned articles called 'Admitting Women to Foreign Universities', in which the anonymous author discussed news and debates surrounding the women's efforts in gaining access to a university education. For instance, the magazine reported on the court case of some British women against the chancellor of the Edinburgh university, who opposed their acquisition of scientific degrees in

⁵⁶⁷ 'Мозаика' [Mosaic], *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 207. [в последнее время, все чаще и чаще стали появляться в прессе статьи о высшем женском образовании].

⁵⁶⁸ Domino, 'Feuilleton Sketches', *Modnyi magazin*, 1877, 48. [Это, по крайней мере, не слова, слова и слова, как говорил Гамлет, а факты. Надо же еще подумать о положении женщины, все еще занимающей в нашем обществе такое незавидное место].

⁵⁶⁹ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 329. [В Европе, движение в пользу женщин можно назвать всеобщим, потому что даже и те лица, которые восстают против некоторых притязаний радикальный сторонник женщин, признают все же за этими последними равноправность с мужчинами в деле образования].

⁵⁷⁰ Ivanov, 'A Woman about Women', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 368. [Как в Соединенных Штатах, так и в Англии, женщины начинают сознавать пользу и необходимость высшего образования и мало-помалу сбрасывают с себя сеть предрассудков, которою они были спутаны].

medicine.⁵⁷¹ The columnist pointed out that the judge himself supported women's education in general but opposed mixed classes and the women's wish to earn their living through medicine. In another issue, a column reported on and discussed a similar case at the Cornell University in New York where a special commission granted women the right to obtain degrees and, moreover, allowed mixed classes. Another major innovation in American universities was the decision to create an infrastructure for female students where they could work maintaining their dormitories and thus earn the means to support themselves and their studies. The columnist summed up 'a completely new method of education; a mixed education with men and, at the same time, a life closely intertwined with regular women's duties; in other words, combining education and domesticity in one sphere will solve, maybe, the task which still serves as the basis for heated arguments between the supporters of women's education and its opponents'.⁵⁷² In this way, the magazine was the platform which informed women about ongoing debates and innovative practices, all of which shed light on international trends towards women's education, in which women in different countries actively rallied and fought against widespread prejudice and limitations. It not presented progressive ideas as possible and achievable, but also shaped a sense of common problems and interests which united women in the Western hemisphere.

In regards to Russia, Rekhnevskaja-Mei stressed that the liberation of women began when 'influential people [intelligentsia] paid attention to the insufficiency of Russian women's education and admitted it was necessary in order to give them the opportunity to develop their intellectual capabilities on the same level as men and, in this way, realize their strength, understand the calling of humanity and aspire for social benefit'.⁵⁷³ One key obstacle to granting women access to higher education was a conservative belief that it would lead to the loss of women's femininity and impede their moral purity. This argument was addressed in the magazine, which offered to readers an alternative argument, that the reason for women's moral 'flaws' was not knowledge but, on the contrary, ignorance. An interesting idea was expressed in this regard in an article on women's education in Russia that was reprinted in *Modnyi magazin* from the liberal St. Petersburg newspaper *Golos* which stated that 'so-called 'femininity' is a totally conditional

⁵⁷¹ 'Прием женщин в иностранные университеты' [Admitting women in foreign universities], *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 279.

⁵⁷² 'Admitting women in foreign universities', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 296. [совершенно новый метод образования: совместное обучение с мужчинами и, в то же время, жизнь тесно связанная с обыкновенными женскими обязанностями, одним словом соединение образования и домашнего в одной среде, разрешит, может быть, ту задачу, которая служит, до сих пор, основанием горячих споров между сторонниками женского образования и противниками его].

⁵⁷³ Rekhnevskaja-Mei, 'Emancipation of Women in Russia', *Modnyi magazin*, 1862, 160. [Влиятельные люди обратили внимание на недостаточность образования русских женщин; признали нужным дать им возможность развить свои умственные способности наравне с мужчинами, сознать, таким образом, свои силы, понять назначение человека и стремиться к общественной пользе].

concept and comes down to the mere fact that the character and habits of a woman are dominated by certain traits which do not play a dominant role in men'.⁵⁷⁴ On the contrary, as the article argued, education and cultivation could only enhance the best qualities in a woman: '[s]erious education can only strengthen and develop women's positive features; thus, it will inevitably develop the sense of dignity, the sense of measure and decency, as well as self-control, the very qualities inextricably linked to an idea of a "decent woman"'.⁵⁷⁵ Although defining femininity as a social construction must have sounded revolutionary to the Russian audience, this standpoint was definitely shared, even if not that bluntly articulated, by *Modnyi magazin*'s editorial staff. It systematically emphasized the fact that women's limited awareness and capacities were in fact the mere result of the narrow education and social restrictions imposed on them that in no way were a feature of women's nature. Such reasoning could be seen as a way to combat women's own fears and anxieties over being accused of abandoning their femininity and deviating from their family and motherly duties. Reconciliation between the seemingly opposing approaches arguably provided *Modnyi magazin*'s readers with a comforting compromise that allowed them to both develop their intellectual abilities and preserve their socially accepted – or rather expected – female identity.

In 1872, the question of women's full matriculation arose in the University of Zurich and provoked heated international debates among academics and universities' officials on women's capacities in regards to serious education.⁵⁷⁶ *Modnyi magazin* thus dedicated several articles to informing readers on the opposing views in this debate, in particular between the Zurich professors of medicine, who accepted female students, and Professor Theodor von Bischoff (1807-1882) from a Munich university, who was a radical opponent of this innovation. According to *Modnyi magazin*, Zurich academicians and officials did not see any reason why women students should have not be given the opportunity to prove their ability to study on the same level as men. In contrast to this experimental approach, the magazine argued, the famous Munich professor approached the question with an a priori method and based on a 'biased assumptions', such as: 'by God's and nature's will, women are deprived of the capability to study and apply sciences, especially, natural sciences and medicine'.⁵⁷⁷ According to von Bischoff, the study anatomy by

⁵⁷⁴ 'Высшее образование наших женщин. Окончание' [Higher Education of Our Women. Ending], *Modnyi magazin*, *Modnyi magazin*, 1880, 245. [так называемая «женственность» - понятие совершенно условное и сводится к тому, что в характере и привычках женщины преобладают такие стороны, которые у мужчин не имеют преобладающего значения].

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. [Серьезное образование может только укрепить и развить хорошие стороны, так, оно несомненно разовьет и чувство собственного достоинства, и чувство меры и приличия, и самообладание, т.е. качества, неразрывно связанные с представлением о «порядочной» женщине].

⁵⁷⁶ R. K., 'Из Цюриха' [From Zurich], *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 247.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. [по божескому и естественному определению, женщины лишены способности к изучению и применению наук и, преимущественно, естествознания и медицины].

women was not only ‘disrespectful of femininity but also “a sin against nature, a sin as unforgivable as a sin against the Holy Spirit”’.⁵⁷⁸ This position was presented in *Modnyi magazin* as outstandingly backward; commenting on the views of the Munich professor, the columnist suggested that Europeans would have disgraced themselves terribly ‘if a Japanese Mikado were to decide to inquire into the state of the “woman question” in our “educated” countries’.⁵⁷⁹ At the same time, von Bischoff’s view remained influential across Europe and served as a reference point for Russian conservatives. For instance, Minister of Education Dmitriy Alekseevich Tolstoy (1823-1889) opposed the opening of medical courses for women in St. Petersburg, ‘happily endorsing the opinion of Professor von Bischoff of Munich who, on the basis of ‘scientific investigation’, had concluded that women were physiologically unfit for the study and practice of medicine.’⁵⁸⁰ Thus, by covering international developments, *Modnyi magazin* simultaneously expressed its position in the national debates, even if it was reluctant to directly express its disagreement with the authorities and officials.

At this point it is important to mention that the major achievement of Russian feminists in the domain of education was the opening in the late 1870s of the Women’s Higher Courses at the major universities of the Empire (Moscow, Kazan, Kiev, and St. Petersburg). Resulting generally from organized efforts in lobbying the government, these courses allowed women to graduate with full diplomas. Since they accepted female applicants of all social backgrounds and thus from varied economic situations, the feminists, under the leadership of Filosofova and Stasova, organized a system of moral and financial support ‘for thousands of women who were to make up the major part of the female professional class and the female intelligentsia of the early twentieth century’.⁵⁸¹ Regarding the progress of women’s education, *Modnyi magazine* attributed to Russian women the role of direct participant and contributor, both as activists and students. For instance, the article reprinted from the newspaper *Golos* discussed the opening of women’s higher courses in St. Petersburg and Moscow and argued: ‘mostly thanks to the energy and perseverance of Russian women, the question of women’s higher education is acquiring firm ground. It is remarkable that this was achieved with very limited help from the government and with the utter indifference of society, taken as a whole’.⁵⁸² This was complemented by the legitimization of new

⁵⁷⁸ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 329. [попиране женственности но «грех против природы, грех столь же непростительный, как грех против Святого Духа].

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. [если японский микадо вздумает осведомиться о состоянии женского вопроса в наших «образованных» странах].

⁵⁸⁰ Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement*, 84-85.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, 83.

⁵⁸² ‘Высшее образование наших женщин (из «Голоса»)» [Higher Education of Our Women (from *Golos*)], *Modnyi magazin*, 1880, 237. [благодаря преимущественно энергии и настойчивости русских женщин, вопрос о высшем женском образовании стал у нас на широкую и твердую почву. Замечательно, что это достигнуто с весьма ограниченной помощью правительства и при полнейшем безучастии общества, взятого в целом].

role models, those of women students and women academics. For instance, in 1874, *Modnyi magazin* included a note on Sofia Kovalevskaja, who became the Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Göttingen, the second woman to obtain this degree at this institution. In 1876, an anonymous columnist reported that Varvara Kashevarova-Rudneva defended her dissertation and became a Doctor of Medicine, adding: 'It is worth hoping that Ms. Kashevarova-Rudneva will not be the only exceptional case, but that other women will follow her example as well'.⁵⁸³ Such rhetoric is related to the role that *Modnyi magazin* granted to women themselves, as they were presented as actors in the process of broadening of their education opportunities.

By covering the pro-women's movement that was gaining momentum both in Russia and in the 'enlightened' countries of the West, the magazine's rhetoric provided women with a supportive voice and a sense of perspective. The columnists concluded in this respect: 'Still many questions on this subject remain unresolved. Sometimes more or less prudent objections are raised, and then they are followed by doubts about both the ability of women to study medicine and do any assiduous scholarly work'.⁵⁸⁴ All such discussions were presented from the perspective that critical and reactionary views were gradually giving way to 'newer, more rational and humane ideas', suggesting that women were as suitable for education and professional activities as men.⁵⁸⁵ In this context, Voskresenskaia commented on British male academics who, while admitting women's right for education, opposed their right to earn a living and, 'in light of the unavoidable question of how unmarried women should then support their own existence, point to a measure, which is hardly realizable in practice and disregards its humiliating character – namely that unmarried women should be supported by their relatives, and in case of the absence of such, charitable organizations'.⁵⁸⁶ Similar concerns were raised with regards to Russian opponents of women's work. For instance, the columnist pointed out how: 'the poor woman question – which already needs to fight against genuine obstacles – having, so to say, the legitimate right of existence, also encounters such assaults which emerge only from the unconscientious attitude (or wish) to flaunt with cheap wit'.⁵⁸⁷ This remark was a reaction to the comment of the columnist of

⁵⁸³ Domino, 'Feuilleton Sketches', *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 174. [Надо надеяться, что г-жа Кашеварова-Руднева не останется единственным, исключительным случаем, что ее примеру последуют и другие женщины].

⁵⁸⁴ 'From Zurich', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 247. [Еще весьма многие вопросы по этому предмету остаются неразрешенными. То поднимаются более или менее благоразумные возражения, то порождается сомнение в обей способности женщин к изучению медицины и к усидчивому ученому труду].

⁵⁸⁵ 'Закон нового времени' [A Law of the New Time], *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 61. [новые, более рациональные и гуманные идеи].

⁵⁸⁶ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 240. [в виду неизбежного вопроса о том, как же должны поддерживать это существование одинокие женщины, указывают на меру, трудно приводимую на практике, не говоря уже о ее унижительном характере – именно на то, что одиноких женщин должны содержать их родственники, а за неимением таковых, благотворительные учреждения].

⁵⁸⁷ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 9. [бедный «женский вопрос», которому приходится так бороться со многими действительными, имеющими, так сказать, законное право

Golos who wrote that ‘women, perhaps, could be given certain occupations, but only those which do not require particular acumen’.⁵⁸⁸ In contrast to such views, *Modnyi magazin* defended the position that, while education was the necessary pre-condition for emancipation, women’s fair labor, or respectable and fairly-paid women’s participation in the labor-market, was the actual goal.

7.2 Women’s labour

Already in the early 1860s, Vsevolod Krestovskiy argued in one of his social life reviews how:

For so many years our literature and journalism have been discussing women’s labour and women’s emancipation, and – one must admit – for the most part these discussions were merely abstract reflections... Not only in society, but even, unfortunately, in literature itself -- even up to now -- quite vague notions prevail regarding the woman question. So often we have had a chance to witness conversations in a highly ‘progressive’ spirit... And so what? The majority of those people understood the emancipation of women in such a narrow sense that it turned into an extreme vulgarity. It was thus related primarily to the freedom of woman’s feelings and woman’s relations. [...] What a miserable and insignificant creature we must have considered a woman to be, if all her activity, her freedom and social worth were limited by a mere freedom of feelings.⁵⁸⁹

In this passage, Krestovskiy refers to the ‘sentimentalization’ of women’s nature and ‘the rehabilitation of the heart’ introduced to Russians earlier in the century by the novels of George Sand and seen by the emancipators of the post-reform era as a one-sided quasi-liberation which left women on the sidelines of socio-economic life.⁵⁹⁰ In contrast, the magazine’s editorial staff advocated the need to engage women in the latter and prepare them accordingly. In 1865, the magazine published a lengthy two-part article titled ‘More on Women’s Labour’ signed by ‘Liubimov’. This article discussed the need to provide women with the appropriate upbringing and

существования, препятствиями, встречает еще на своем пути и такие нападки, которые возникают лишь от недобросовестного отношения к делу или желания блеснуть дешевым остроумием].

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. [женщинам можно, пожалуй, предоставить некоторые занятия, но только те, которые не требуют особой сообразительности].

⁵⁸⁹ Krestovskiy, ‘What is Going On and Where’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 88. [Сколько лет сряду наша литература и журналистика толковали о женском труде и женской эмансипации и – надо сознаться – по большей части эти писания были одно только мудрствование... Не только в обществе, но даже, к сожалению, в самой литературе даже и до сих пор господствуют весьма неясные понятия по поводу женского вопроса. Сколько раз нам доводилось быть свидетелями разговоров, в весьма «прогрессивном» духе... И что же? Большая часть этих господ понимали женскую эмансипацию в смысле до того узком, что он переходил уже в крайнюю пошлость. Дело шло прежде всего о свободе женского чувства и женских отношений. [...] Каким бы жалким и ничтожным существом должны мы были считать женщину, если бы всю ее деятельность, свободу и социальное значение ограничивали одною только свободою чувств].

⁵⁹⁰ See Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement*, 19.

education that would enable them to occupy public posts. The author's overall argument can be summarized by the following quote: 'As upbringing prepares a man to be a useful citizen, in a similar way it should prepare this in a woman as well'.⁵⁹¹ The author discussed the need for many women, particularly unmarried, to support themselves through labour and argued that this required that society, first, provide women with the necessary education to enable them to 'choose their future profession' and, second, develop a respectable attitude towards women's paid labour as such.⁵⁹²

This argument reflected the broad standpoint of *Modnyi magazin*, as one of the key ideas it promoted was the universally applicable necessity of work. The editorial staff of the magazine presented work as 'the law of the time, which simultaneously is God's law, since God condemned all living to work'.⁵⁹³ These words are taken from the lengthy article 'The Law of the New Time' [Закон Нового времени] which argued that work was not only the means but also the goal, the condition for a fulfilled and useful life for any person: for a rich woman as much as for a poor man. Although it was published unsigned, it could have been written by Rekhnevskaja-Mei, since it reflected her overall personal standpoint in regards to this question. She expressed it in other articles arguing that genuine happiness can only be achieved through productive and honest work [честный труд] and daily application of one's energies. Consequently, according to the magazine, to keep women on the margins of the labor market and productive activity meant to keep them outside of social progress: women's work was declared 'the first stone placed in the foundation of a genuine emancipation for women – a means whose practicality leads to good results'.⁵⁹⁴ This reasoning reflected the ideas of Maria Vernadskaja, who advocated for women's paid work as the main condition for their economic, social, and moral liberation. In a similar way, the magazine repeatedly pointed to the artificial nature of women's passive role in traditional society and encouraged its female readers to adopt 'a more natural worldview' and realize 'the living truth – that through work and knowledge they will be freed from everlasting guardianship, and will achieve independence and lasting respect'.⁵⁹⁵ The magazine's authors and Rekhnevskaja-Mei herself frequently expressed their hopes that in the near future women would take a more

⁵⁹¹ 'Еще о женском труде' [More on Women's Labour], *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, 12. [Как воспитание prepares в мужчине полезного гражданского деятеля, так же оно должно приготовить к этому и женщину]

⁵⁹² Ibid. [избирать свою будущую профессию].

⁵⁹³ 'A Law of the New Time', *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 61. [Закон нового времени, который есть одновременно и закон Божий, поскольку Бог обрек все живое на труд].

⁵⁹⁴ Krestovski, 'What is Going On and Where', 88. [первый камень, положенный в основание истинной эмансипации женщины, – средство, практически ведущее к добрым результатам, помимо всех теорий о свободе чувства].

⁵⁹⁵ 'О женском труде и женском воспитании' [On Women's Work and On Women's Upbringing], *Modnyi magazin*, December 1868, 427-428. [живая истина – что трудом и знанием они освободятся от всегдашней опеки, достигнут независимости и прочного уважения].

prominent place in the public life of the Empire: ‘apart from broader personal and property rights, they should be granted known social rights today, without any fear and even with the benefit of being admitted to some posts and titles’.⁵⁹⁶ This standpoint clearly reflected the feminists’ position of demanding the legal and gradual broadening of women’s rights and opportunities.

One of *Modnyi magazin*’s columnists argued that the first step towards changing women’s exclusion from the labour market happened after the abolition of serfdom and the disappearance of a free labour force, which changed the attitude to work as such. In contrast to the pre-emancipation era, it was argued that a contemporary ‘girl, who works – even in order to, while receiving accommodation and food at her parents’ house, not burden her mother or father with her demands concerning her toilette or small pleasures –, deserves full respect’.⁵⁹⁷ The author thus concluded: ‘the Russian woman question is being placed, completely naturally, in the framework of women’s labour and enjoys, on this basis, general compassion’.⁵⁹⁸ The question of women’s labour was also discussed in the international context. Voskresenskaia emphasized that the ‘question of women’s education and the related means for women’s independent work currently occupie[d] the entire European society’.⁵⁹⁹ For example, it was mentioned that women’s pedagogical activity was gradually becoming common in England, Belgium, and Italy. The United States was praised as the world’s frontrunner in this regard, providing a counterargument to European conservatives:

The activity of American women in general has no equals in any, even the most developed state. [...] The American woman’s gradual winning back of her means to existence, which were unfairly attributed to men only, is so illuminating and so full of object lessons for disproving von Bischoff’s theories.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, 428. [Кроме более широких личных и имущественных прав, уже в настоящее время следовало бы предоставить женщинам и известные права общественные, и без всякого опасения и даже с пользой можно бы допустить их к некоторым должностям и званиям].

⁵⁹⁷ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 308. [Девушка, трудящаяся хотя бы для того, чтобы, получая в родительском доме жилище и стол, не обременять мать или отца еще требованиями относительно своего туалета или маленьких удовольствий, заслуживает полного уважения]

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. [русский женский вопрос становится, совершенно естественным образом в рамках женского труда и пользуется, на этой почве, общим сочувствием].

⁵⁹⁹ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 302. [вопрос о женском образовании и соединенных с тем средствах для женского самостоятельного труда занимает, в данную минуту, все европейское общество].

⁶⁰⁰ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 329. [Деятельность американских женщин, впрочем, вообще такова, что не имеет себе равной ни в каком, даже наиболее развитом, государстве. ... Вообще, постепенно отвоевание американскою женщиною тех средств к существованию, которые так несправедливо были присвоены одному мужчине, так поучительно и полно наглядных доказательств для опровержения фон-бишовских теорий].

The examples of the Western countries served as a point of reference and a justification for the need for progress in this domain in Russia. In this context, granting Russian women access to education was argued to be the first and main step towards women's broader engagement in public life: occupying different posts, contributing to the family budget, establishing labour associations.

The issue of paid work for women acquired a particularly pressing character within the historical and socio-economic context of the time. The liberal reforms of the 1860s and the abolition of serfdom in the first place caused the impoverishment of many gentry families, whose economic prosperity was based on serf labor. This proved to be especially detrimental to women: 'Reforms starting in the 1860s made jobs and independent income necessary for millions of women who were previously supported by their families and the extended kinship network of landlords.'⁶⁰¹ Thus, the urgent need to earn their living produced irreversible consequences for Russian women from all social classes, for which neither they nor the labour market nor society at large were prepared. As a result, by the beginning of the 1870's, the woman question indeed became the question of women's socio-economic integration. As argued by Clements, in these years industrialization and urbanization 'challenged traditional understanding and made finding solutions more pressing'.⁶⁰² In this context, ongoing public debates on women's moral and intellectual suitability for work were, according to Stites, very distant from 'the real world of female employment in this period'.⁶⁰³ In contrast, such challenges raised questions of not only changing the overall social prejudices against women's moral rights and intellectual capacities, but of also enabling actual changes on a practical level, such as providing women in need with access to the labour market and necessary professional and technical training in order to become competitive. This is where the ongoing debate on women's access to higher education merged in the pages of *Modnyi magazin* with the most practical and urgent socio-economic circumstances.

From the late 1860s, *Modnyi magazin*'s rhetoric became increasingly focused on practical issues. The columnists discussed the need for women to earn a living in extraordinarily unfavourable conditions. Stites argues that even at the end of the century, 'educated women seeking employment continued to meet rudeness and hostility, inequality, and insecurity'.⁶⁰⁴ *Modnyi magazin* brought these problem up at their earliest stages: from unbearable working conditions to the general unpreparedness of women, particularly from the educated classes, to work. For example, Rekhnevskaja-Mei claimed that women's superficial, scattered, and highly

⁶⁰¹ Marina Liborakina, 'Women's voluntarism and philanthropy in pre-revolutionary Russia: building a civil society', *Voluntas*, 7:4 (1996): 402.

⁶⁰² Clements, *History of Women in Russia*, 111.

⁶⁰³ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 59.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 171.

impractical education, as well as limited access to vocational training, prevented them from becoming competitive professionals in any domain. In her article ‘On Women’s Labour and Women’s Upbringing’, the editor discussed the practical complications of women’s employment and their overall disadvantaged position on the Russian labour market. On the one hand, Rekhnevskaja-Mei raised the issue of the inequalities between men and women on the labour market: ‘We have long been accustomed to such uneven remuneration for the same work done by men and by women, but from an impartial point of view this should be seen as an outrageous injustice’.⁶⁰⁵ On the other hand, she listed the key reasons which determined this situation: a limited number of occupations available to women, isolation of women from one another (thus the lack of opportunities to form labour associations), limited women’s rights and opportunities both legally and by custom and prejudice, the lack of fundamental professional education, and the generally one-sided and utterly superficial upbringing which emphasized women’s appearance and manners without providing women with any practical skills and knowledge. The editor summed up the consequence of these discriminating conditions: ‘Therefore, scarce information, extreme restriction of rights, limited living conditions and a mostly dependent position of women not only delay their intellectual development but [make] their very labour inefficient – and in the material sense, they themselves become pariahs’.⁶⁰⁶

In light of these multiple problems, *Modnyi magazin* especially focused on discussing the need to provide women not only with higher education but also with practical skills, since ‘according to the law of sad necessity, without physical food a human can not live; intellectual food constitutes for him, already, to a certain extent, a luxury’.⁶⁰⁷ The editorial staff argued that a significant step towards the actual solving of the woman question was the establishment of special technical schools. In 1874, Voskresenskaia wrote: ‘Already many times I had to touch upon this question, but the constantly growing number of poor women workers raises it ever more insistently. [...] A well-mastered specialization, even if only in the domain of needlework, provided many women with the means of existence’.⁶⁰⁸ Elsewhere in the magazine it was said that

⁶⁰⁵ Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, ‘On Women’s Work and Women’s Upbringing’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, 426. [Мы уже давно привыкли к такой неравномерности вознаграждения за одинаковые труды, но на беспристрастный взгляд это должно показаться возмутительной несправедливостью].

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, 427. [Итак, скудный запас сведений, крайнее ограничение прав, стеснительные условия жизни и большею частью зависимое положение женщин, не только задерживает интеллектуальное их развитие, но и труд их делается малопродуктивным – и сами они в имущественном отношении становятся париями].

⁶⁰⁷ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 361. [по закону печальной необходимости, без пищи физической человек жить не может; пища умственная составляет для него, уже, некоторым образом, роскошь].

⁶⁰⁸ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 150. [Мне приходилось уже не раз касаться этого вопроса, но постоянно возрастающее количество бедных тружениц предъявляет его настойчивее и настойчивее с каждым днем [...] Хорошо изученная специальность, хотя бы только по части рукодельной работы, дала многим другим женщинам средства к существованию].

‘[t]he question of (women’s) professional schools [was] naturally put forward as one of the most urgent questions of modern life’.⁶⁰⁹ This once again sheds light on the practical focus of the magazine’s editorial staff, which, while covering the ongoing debates, particularly aimed to address the concrete problems of Russian women and, in this respect, referred to the international context as a source of ideas and innovations. The magazine often gave examples of vocational schools in England, Germany, France, and Poland; for instance: ‘in England, whose example we often follow, schools exist for female maids, cooks, laundresses, etc. [...] For a literate but poor person it is difficult without mastering any craft. It helps [her] in the minutes of direct need’.⁶¹⁰ In this respect, Voskresenskaia addressed prejudices against women’s hands-on work, spread among liberal Russians who, remembering ‘the dark sides of serfdom’, considered the idea of preparing women to work as servants ‘indecent’. In contrast, she wrote: ‘we should look at this more simply and without preconceptions. Not only we need good laundresses, female cooks and others, but many women would like to cook, wash, iron well, in order to always have a guaranteed piece of bread’.⁶¹¹ In this context, Voskresenskaia frequently stressed that there were almost no schools of this type in Russia and argued: ‘It is highly desirable that in our boarding schools [...] there be introduced needlework courses similar to German ones and consisting not only of the unsystematic making of a variety of ugly trinkets’.⁶¹² Although the columnist admitted that needlework was the least beneficial among all the crafts available for women, she nonetheless mentioned that, if well and tastefully made, women’s work could also become a source of stable income for those women who do not have opportunities or talents to find it through other occupations. Overall, in regards to women in need, the magazine was focused on those solutions which did not require long-lasting reforms and could thus help the majority of women in the foreseeable future. In this way, the magazine filled the niche of down-to-earth emancipation, which will become particularly evident in the following section.

⁶⁰⁹ ‘О профессиональных школах для технического образования женщин’ [On Professional Schools for Women’s Technical Education], *Modnyi magazin*, 1879, 112. [вопрос о (женских) профессиональных школах выдвигается сам собою вперед, как один из насущнейших вопросов современной жизни].

⁶¹⁰ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 329. [В Англии, с которой мы часто берем пример, существуют школы для горничных, кухарок, прачек и пр. [...] человеку грамотному, но бедному, плохо без знания какого-нибудь ремесла. Оно выручает его в минуты непосредственной нужды].

⁶¹¹ Ibid. [Но надо взглянуть на дело проще и без предвзятых идей. Не только нам нужны хорошие прачки, кухарки и пр., но и многим женщинам хотелось бы уметь хорошо стряпать, стирать, гладить, для того, чтобы иметь всегда обеспеченный кусок хлеба].

⁶¹² Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 302. [Весьма желательно чтобы в наших женских пансионах... были бы введены курсы рукоделья, подобные германским, а не состоящие из одного, лишенного всякой системы, делания разных некрасивых безделушек].

Chapter 8: Practical solution: feminist philanthropy

Marked by rapid urbanization and modernization, the decades following the abolition of serfdom saw a dramatic increase in the number of poor and needy, among whom women constituted the most vulnerable group. In response to this pressing social dynamic and the lack of an adequate reaction from the state and society at large, feminists' efforts, according to Pushkareva, aimed at providing 'women with opportunities for professional occupations and – by means of that – to grant them economic independence'.⁶¹³ Regarding practical efforts towards supporting Russian women in need, Richard Stites argues that: '[t]he feminists' life-style, conditioned by their temperaments and social backgrounds, led them quite naturally into areas more philanthropic than philosophic'.⁶¹⁴ As a result, together with advocating for higher education for women, the organized pro-women's charity formed the core of feminist activism over the period from the 1860s to the 1890s.⁶¹⁵ According to Stites, in Russia '[t]he feminists began with charity. Philanthropy blended easily into feminism, and in a short time their efforts were pointed in the direction of helping women to live, to study and to work'.⁶¹⁶ While philanthropic activities were led by both feminists and nihilists (and often were the result of their joined efforts), a moderate and reforming attitude determined a topical, down-to-earth, women-targeted focus of the feminists, which distinguished them from other proponents of women's emancipation of the time. It implied activities by women and for women, hence women were the main actors and the promotion of women was the final goal – a standpoint which was truly ground-breaking for the times. While pro-women's philanthropy embodied the very essence of the feminist approach to the woman question, popularizing this activity and the vision behind it was the most important way in which *Modnyi magazin* contributed to the emerging women's movement.

The fact that ever more Russian women urgently needed support in covering their very basic needs determined the particular practice-oriented focus of *Modnyi magazin*. 'Less words and more action, emancipators!' exclaimed a social life reviewer in 1874, and this motto reflected the practice-oriented angle characteristic for *Modnyi magazin*'s rhetoric in the 1870s. In particular, Voskresenskaia's regular column 'Letter to the Province' focused on practical and urgent aspects of the Russian woman question and promoted philanthropy as the way to address them in both the Russian capital and the province. It was in this column that the magazine's editorial staff expressed and explained its standpoint:

⁶¹³ Pushkareva, 'Feminism in Russia', 367.

⁶¹⁴ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 66.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 69.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, 68.

Our readers already know our position concerning the woman question. Without engaging in abstract reflections on the future of women, without demanding anything hardly feasible or remotely possible for meeting urgent needs, we look at the matter from a purely practical point of view. [...] Great doctrines, great reforms are the business of great people; we, little people, will work on a little scale, and, if each of us does at least half of what's possible for us, then the results of our common work will be immense. Let's not be misled by the opinion that our efforts constitute just a drop in the sea.⁶¹⁷

This position reflected the Russian feminists' overall belief in the necessity and the power of 'small deeds', which could lead to the genuine long-term transformation of society while simultaneously addressing urgent challenges. Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modnyi magazin* supported and promoted feminist charity in several important ways, in particular by functioning as a medium for articulating principles and popularizing methods, a newsletter for reporting activities, and a community-generating platform. I will discuss each of these aspects and comment on their significance for negotiating Russian women's marginal social position.

8.1 Redefining philanthropy: from almsgiving to organized civic activity

First of all, *Modnyi magazin* contributed to (re-)defining the very meaning of charity as a traditional ladies' activity in line with feminist understanding. Stites argues that the basic goals and techniques of early Russian feminists were inspired by those first developed in the West, particularly by Clara Balfour and other English feminists who believed that 'the improvement of woman's lot was the mission of women themselves'.⁶¹⁸ Suggesting that 'more fortunate' women help their less fortunate counterparts, '[t]hese notions were the outgrowth of the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon tradition that had transformed *noblesse oblige* into a modern urban variety of 'social duty'.⁶¹⁹ By adopting these ideas, Russian feminists transformed the practice of emotional and irrational almsgiving rooted in the Orthodox idea of selfless compassion into the organized and results-oriented, or 'rational', charitable activities of the Western type.⁶²⁰ *Modnyi magazin*

⁶¹⁷ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 13. [Читательницы наши знают уже наш взгляд на этот вопрос. Не задаваясь отвлеченными соображениями о будущности женщин, не требуя ничего трудно-осуществимого и малосущественного, мы смотрим на дело с чисто практической стороны. ... Великие учения, великие реформы – это дело великих людей; мы же, маленькие люди, будем трудиться на маленьком поприще, и если каждый из нас сделает хотя половину того, на то он способен, то и тогда результаты нашего общего труда выйдут громадными. Пусть нас не смущают толки о том, что сделанное нами – капля в море].

⁶¹⁸ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 64.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, 141.

consistently distinguished between the two approaches and convincingly discussed the long-term strategic benefits of the latter.

The magazine's editorial staff pointed to the sentimental, vain, and often useless character of activities conducted by Russian society ladies. Thus, already by 1863, a social life reviewer ironically commented on such social types as 'a charitable lady who sometimes ravaged her friends for establishing shelters and schools in order to receive the socially flattering title of orphans' mother'⁶²¹ or 'salon philanthropists who, with their sugar-coated words, try to get you to either buy a ticket or subscribe for at least one rubble'.⁶²² *Modnyi magazin* also raised the question of impulsive and non-systemic individual almsgiving as a sign of indifference for the lot of those who were forced to ask for it:

Charity is understood by everyone quite differently. For many, unfortunately for too many, it is embodied by almsgiving only. Those many defend themselves with very respectable arguments, but if one thinks well, the driving force behind [such] merciful alms turns out not to be true Christian virtues but mostly a wish to get rid, in the easiest way, of the one in need and, thus, an indifference to his or her condition.⁶²³

Contrary to these common perceptions of charity as dictated by compassionate impulse, the magazine suggested an alternative version of women's social engagement based on reason and purpose: organized goal-oriented philanthropy targeted at addressing concrete social issues. Thus, in the 1870s, when the popularization of organized philanthropy became the central component of its agenda on the woman question, *Modnyi magazin* called its readers to be led 'not only by heart but also by reason'⁶²⁴ and to remember that 'what is given indiscriminately, just in order to get rid of an obtrusive request, is taken away from those [who are] truly in need and therefore is used in a way exactly contrarily to its objective'.⁶²⁵

⁶²¹ 'At the Fireplace (Feuilleton)', 1863, 264. [благотворительная барыня, которая иногда разоряла своих знакомых, для того чтобы заводить приюты и школы с целью получать в обществе лестное название матери сирот].

⁶²² Ibid. [салонные филантропы: своими медоточивыми словами старается он заставить вас или взять какой-нибудь билет, или подписаться хоть на один рубль].

⁶²³ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 73. [Понятие о благотворительности понимается весьма разнообразно людьми. Для многих, очень многих, к сожалению, оно олицетворяется только в виде милостыни. Эти многие приводят в свое оправдание весьма почтенные доводы, но если разобраться хорошенько, то руководительною причиною милосердных подаяний окажутся не столько истинные христианские добродетели, сколько желание отделаться легчайшим способом от нуждающегося, а следовательно, и равнодушие к его положению].

⁶²⁴ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 9. [руководиться не одним сердцем, но и рассудком].

⁶²⁵ Ibid. [даваемое без разбора, часто лишь для того, чтобы отвязаться от назойливой просьбы, отнимается у истинно нуждающегося и потому употребляется совершенно противоположно задаче].

Feminist philanthropy of the second half of the nineteenth century differed from earlier ladies' charity, first and foremost, because of feminists' profound respect for those whom tried to help and the conviction that they needed to help primarily with the development of the skills necessary for future self-sufficiency.⁶²⁶ This attitude was convincingly promoted and insisted upon in the pages of *Modnyi magazin*. Voskresenskaia's several articles were specifically dedicated to outlining the magazine's overall standpoint in regards to charity, especially one written early in 1873 in which she explained the standpoint in detail. Thus, the role that *Modnyi magazin* attributed to private philanthropists was that of mediators among the poor and their particular problems, situations, and needs, on the one hand, and the organizations or social institutions which could address problems causing poverty (e.g. lack of education, skills, employment opportunities, infrastructure for work, and particularly pressing issues for women). Furthermore, the magazine called on philanthropists to focus their own efforts on 'delivering to the poor such means for [reaching] independence which would allow them to not call for external charity [support] at all'.⁶²⁷ Overall, it was argued that resorting to third party aid on a permanent basis should be reserved only for those who could not earn their living due to their health or age, since, according to *Modnyi magazin*, '[F]or everyone who is able to work, charity is the humiliation of their human dignity, and if, in spite of this, it is joyously accepted by some, it nonetheless corrupts a person'.⁶²⁸ In this context, Voskresenskaia expressed the main idea of her column and the magazine's central point on this issue: 'Permanent, reliable means of self-reliance through labour are acquired only by the general development of a person, one's education and special knowledge'.⁶²⁹

In this respect, the practical down-to-earth and 'small scale' approach of feminist charity did not imply the lack of strategic vision. On the contrary, its overarching priority was not only to rescue but mostly to empower poor women and enable them to support themselves and reach economic and, thus, moral independence. In light of the need for women's socio-economic integration, feminist charity developed in three main dimensions: supporting women entering the professional job market, providing vocational training for girls, and advocating higher education and related support for female students.⁶³⁰ Accordingly, promoting these strategic and rational aspects shaped the basis of *Modnyi magazin*'s rhetoric on philanthropy. In line with the priorities of feminists, Voskresenskaia regularly stressed the need to support women in need in getting access to paid labour, technical skills, and education: 'Let's not simply lament about the desolate

⁶²⁶ See Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 111-133.

⁶²⁷ Ibid. [доставление бедняку таких средств к самостоятельности, которые позволяли бы ему не прибегать вовсе к посторонней благотворительности].

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ See Liborakina, 'Women's Voluntarism', 397-411.

victims of misery but also try to ease their lot by establishing both general education and vocational schools, as well as apartments, for unsheltered women workers'.⁶³¹ In this way, *Modnyi magazin* promoted private philanthropy as a legal and socially appropriate way through which Russian women could practically contribute to the emancipatory project:

In certain cases, of course, a few rubles can save a person from disease, distress, shame - but in the grand scheme of things, delivering the means for the permanent earning of even a few kopeks through feasible labour constituted an incomparably bigger benefit than a random, whimsy giving of dozens of rubbles. And if such delivering is combined with attempts to increase salaries according to the efforts and progress of women workers, then this leads to the practical solving of an important part of the [women's] labour question.⁶³²

As becomes evident from this quote, by promoting this interpretation of charity, *Modnyi magazin* popularized feminist philanthropy as a long-term strategic endeavour. The importance of the magazine's contribution should be regarded in the context of the recent re-evaluation of these initiatives by Russian feminists that transformed traditional ladies occupations into an early form of civic activism. The Russian scholar Marina Liborakina argues that a traditional emphasis on altruism and 'female self-sacrifice' misinterprets the civic essence of female philanthropy in the late Russian Empire, instead underscoring women's role as agents of social change. She argues that, while charitable activities were the only legal and socially accepted form of women's public activism, they constituted a critical turning point of the Russian women's movement. According to Liborakina, in Russia 'charitable motives, social improvement and women's liberation became increasingly intertwined. [...] Under the general call for reforms and popular enthusiasm for their activity, they surpassed socially approved 'ladies deeds' and began to work for social change, advocating women's equality and promoting women's education and mutual aid'.⁶³³ Similarly, within its campaign on redefining and popularizing feminist philanthropy, *Modnyi magazin* fostered the development of women's sense of responsibility for both their less fortunate female compatriots and the unfolding of the entire emancipatory project as such. Therefore, by popularizing this aspect of feminist activity among Russian women across the Empire, the

⁶³¹ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 149. [Будем же не только сожалеть о несчастных жертвах нужды, но и стараться облегчить участь их устройством как общеобразовательных, так и технически-рукодельных училищ, а также приютов для бездомных тружениц].

⁶³² Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', 1871, 43. [В частных случаях, конечно, несколько рублей могут спасти человека от болезней, бедствий, позора, - но в общем ходе дела, доставление средств к постоянному ежедневному добыванию хотя бы только нескольких копеек посильным трудом составляют несравненно большее благодеяние, нежели случайная, прихотливая выдача десятков рублей. И если доставление это сопряжено со старанием увеличивать заработную плату по мере усилий и успехов работниц, то им достигается практическое разрешение важной части рабочего вопроса].

⁶³³ Liborakina, 'Women's Voluntarism', 403.

magazine's editorial staff, most importantly, contributed to shaping their own self-perception as, first, a social group and, second, as active contributors to social progress.

The magazine's rhetoric on the civic nature of philanthropy was presented in the European context, which suggested that, in the West, women's organized charity formatively contributed to the improvement of women's conditions in particular and social progress in general. As with all other questions in regards to women's emancipation, the initiatives of British women were covered with particular enthusiasm and respect and presented as an example to follow in Russia and worldwide. For example, Voskresenskaia discussed the London School-Board Society, created by British women to educate the lowest social classes, and concluded:

Let's wish, for the New Year, that the example of England find imitation in other countries too and that our female philanthropists – instead of organizing spectacles that, after [deducting] the expenses, leave in favour of the poor ridiculously miniscule sums – think about organizing something similar to the London society. A woman can do a lot in such an enterprise.⁶³⁴

Quite often the Russian columnist referred to the British magazine *Queen*. Other countries were also frequently mentioned in *Modnyi magazin*'s reports. For example, Voskresenskaia wrote that 'in Prussia the question of public health is in general in a better shape than in any other European state, and that could be namely thanks to the activity of private charitable societies'.⁶³⁵ It was followed up by a description of a practice which obliged every member of a philanthropic society to engage two more members who, the columnist argued, would substantially facilitate the spreading and development of philanthropy in Russia too.

Voskresenskaia also referred to the West to justify the activities of Russian women. For instance, she commented on the report published in the newspaper *Golos* in regards to the efforts of one lady from the Voronezh province in 'dedicating her modest means to the school for peasant children which she herself founded on her own estate'.⁶³⁶ Despite the success of the school, to which children were coming from several nearby villages, some of the locals demanded that the

⁶³⁴ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 12. [Пожелаем, но новый год, чтобы пример Англии нашел подражание и в других странах, и чтобы наши филантропки, - вместо затевания спектаклей, после которых, за прочими расходами, в пользу бедных остаются ничтожные, до смешного, суммы – подумали бы лучше об устройстве чего-нибудь подобного лондонскому обществу. Женщина может сделать многое в таком предприятии].

⁶³⁵ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 103. [В Пруссии дело народного здоровья находится, вообще, в лучшем состоянии, нежели в каком-либо другом европейском государстве, и это может быть благодаря именно деятельности частных благотворительных обществ].

⁶³⁶ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 105. [посвящающая свои небольшие средства на основанную ею, в ее собственном имении, школу для крестьянских детей].

woman be declared mad and deprived of her estate. Responding to widespread provincial prejudice against women's initiatives, Voskresenskaia wrote:

It is difficult to imagine that in any educated country anyone would dare to accuse a woman of being incapable of managing her property and even of being mad, merely based on the fact that she decided to teach others' children at her own expense...⁶³⁷

8.2 *Modnyi magazin* as a newsletter: call for engagement

Voskresenskaia pointed out that one of the major obstacles for the success of philanthropic initiatives in Russia was their lack of publicity and visibility, which limited opportunities for engaging new members and raising funds. In this context, *Modnyi magazin* aimed at informing the public on developments in this regard, as well as at encouraging women to participate in philanthropic activities, both as initiators of new organizations and as permanent member or occasional contributors to existing ones. Between 1869 and 1875, almost every issue of the magazine covered a wide range of philanthropic initiatives in Russia and abroad, targeting people in need and vulnerable social groups (e.g. orphans, lonely elderly people, poor students coming from the provinces). Nevertheless, being a women-targeted publication, *Modnyi magazin* focused, first and foremost, on charity conducted not only by women but also for women. In line with the overall editorial agenda, Voskresenskaia's 'Letters to the Province' particularly celebrated initiatives aimed at providing women with professional skills and subsidizing enterprises for their work. While *Modnyi magazin* covered dozens of projects of this kind, large and small, Russian and foreign, I will focus on a few cases that simultaneously illustrate all major aspects of this editorial agenda of philanthropy.

St. Petersburg Society for Cheap Lodgings

Unlike individual charities common during the first half of the century, from the 1860s to 1870s charitable initiatives increasingly started to take the shape of philanthropic circles and societies. One of the most significant among them was the famous Society for Cheap Lodgings, 'the organization that launched the St. Petersburg feminists on their way,'⁶³⁸ as Stites puts it. It was established in the capital in 1858 and successfully functioned till the last days of the Russian Empire. The Society was initiated and chaired by Anna Filosofova, one of the most prominent

⁶³⁷ Ibid. [Трудно представить себе, чтобы в какой-нибудь образованной стране решились обвинить женщину в неспособности владеть своим имуществом и даже в безумии, на основании лишь того, что она вздумала учить чужих детей на свои средства...].

⁶³⁸ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 69.

Russian feminists (whom I have already mentioned several times). ‘Committed to projects aimed at economic self-sufficiency for women’,⁶³⁹ this noblewoman was at the very root of traditionally organized private philanthropy in Russia. Her name and the Society for Cheap Lodgings were among the most commonly referenced ‘success stories’ of Russian feminists in *Modnyi magazin*. For instance, Voskresenskaia described how: ‘I often have occasion to talk about the useful activities of the Society for Cheap Lodgings, which constantly reminds us about its most practical measures towards supporting people in need, particularly women’.⁶⁴⁰ In the ‘Letters to the Province’ as well as in other columns and special notes, *Modnyi magazin* regularly covered the activities of the Society, published its reports, and explained the social agenda behind different dimensions of its work: providing accommodation and food to the poor, educating children, creating infrastructure for women’s work and vocational training, supporting female students and old women. By reporting on it, the editorial staff further explained and illustrated the principles of the feminist charity, without, however, referring to the term ‘feminism’. Thus, the objectives of the Society were presented as exemplary in regards to the long-term benefit which such organizations could bring to solving the woman question. For instance, Voskresenskaia argued that it aimed

to not only provide poor women with the primary necessities of life, but also give them the means to find a permanent, reliable source of earning money and provide them with an opportunity to educate their children, in order to secure their future independence as well.⁶⁴¹

It was particularly emphasized that the workshops of the Society were ‘founded *not on a commercial basis* but with a purely philanthropic goal: in order to, while giving poor families cheap lodgings, simultaneously provide them with the means to pay for them’.⁶⁴² This last point was published in an untitled and unsigned note, dedicated completely to informing the readers about the news of the Society. It was summed up by discussing how women who used to live in the Lodging had either found independent employment or gotten married and were able to

⁶³⁹ Norma Noonan and Carol Nechemias, ed. ‘Anna Filosofova’, In *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 22-24.

⁶⁴⁰ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 106. [Мне приходится часто говорить о полезной деятельности «Общества дешевых квартир», постоянно заявляющем о себе самыми практическими мерами в отношении помощи нуждающимся, в особенности женщинам].

⁶⁴¹ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, 74. [стремится к практическому осуществлению своих целей, состоящих в том, чтобы обеспечить бедным женщинам только первые потребности жизни, но и дать им средства к постоянному, верному заработку и к возможности образовывать своих детей, а следовательно, снабдить и их будущую самостоятельностью].

⁶⁴² Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, 360. [не на коммерческих началах, а с чисто филантропической целью: чтобы, давая бедным семьям дешевые квартиры, дать им, в то же время, средства платить за них].

contribute to the family budget thanks to practical skills which they acquired in the Society's workshops. The author concluded: 'all this proves that, equal to literacy, there is a substantial need to teach women crafts, which will certainly have immense results and which can not be accounted for within our current, narrow framework'.⁶⁴³ In this way, the magazine stressed how organized philanthropy could both target urgent practical needs and serve the far-reaching improvement of women's socio-economic and moral conditions.

Covering the functioning of the Society also served to legitimize the role models of contemporary femininity. Thus, the social activity of Anna Filosofova was presented as an example of how a dedicated woman could initiate a campaign, which both addressed the urgent needs of her compatriots and fostered far-reaching social transformations. Overall, Filosofova and her colleagues were presented as the incarnation of genuinely emancipated Russian women: able, thus, to think, act, and remove obsolete social limitations which prevented them and their female compatriots from living meaningful lives, without, nonetheless, breaking bonds with society and traditions, as did female nihilists, radicals, and false emancipées.

Informing the readership about the Society served several functions. First, as I have discussed, it further promoted the overall feminist standpoint. Second, it mediated between metropolitan feminists and those readers of the magazine who could potentially join them, particularly metropolitan ladies. Third, it provided Russian women with a pattern for organizing similar initiatives, particularly in the provinces. This idea constituted the basis for the agenda behind Voskresenskaia's column: to spread the trend further to the Russian peripheries. While the title of the column itself points out this intention, this call for participation was often explicitly communicated by Voskresenskaia. The second example will shed even more light on each of these aspects of *Modnyi magazin's* agenda.

Society for Support of Poor Women in St. Petersburg

As discussed in the first chapter, Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei as well as Sofia Voskresenskaia were themselves active members of another philanthropic society: the Society for the Support of Poor Women in St. Petersburg. It was based on paid membership (10 rubles per year) and functioned as an umbrella organization consisting of nine different circles which dealt with different groups of poor women. Founded in 1865 and existing for many decades, it was another feminist initiative (consisting primarily although not exclusively of women) aimed at providing organized and

⁶⁴³ Ibid. [Все это доказывает, что наравне с грамотностью, стоит существенная потребность обучения женщин ремеслам, что несомненно будет иметь громадные результаты, исчисление которых не подлежит настоящей нашей, тесной, рамке].

systemic support to women in need. In her 'Letters', Voskresenskaia frequently discussed the Society. First of all, similar to how she discussed Filosofova's and other women's activities, she spread the feminist philosophy behind it. For example, concerning the founding principle of the Society, it was argued in the magazine that the funds collected through donations were to be used for creating the sustainable infrastructure for women's learning and work. Voskresenskaia explained:

with regard to the issuance of cash allowances, the Society has adopted a rule - to give out such allowances not in the form of alms but only in [those] special justified cases, when [once-only] cash issue gives a poor woman the opportunity to either take up a certain labour [...] or get settled in such a way which will allow her to not refer to such petty monetary benefits in future.⁶⁴⁴

As explained by Voskresenskaia, adhering to strategic investments – instead of issuing allowances – enabled the Society to establish multiple social enterprises providing poor women with accommodation and the infrastructure for learning and earning their living. Apart from presenting the principles behind it, *Modnyi magazin* and its editorial staff supported this organization by spreading information about it among its readers as well as encouraging them to contribute. The frequency with which *Modnyi magazin* reported on the activity of the Society was clearly reflected in remarks like the following, written by a social life reviewer:

How come?! Again! Ehis boring Society for Support of Poor Women and again this Ladies' Circle! We should admit that this Society is extremely annoying, and under the pretext that it has nine charitable establishments for *poor* women, it empties the pockets of the *rich* ones. This time, after covering all expenses, it collected one thousand rubles – quite a solid sum, don't you agree?⁶⁴⁵

In 1874 Rekhnevskaiia-Mei initiated the creation of one of the Society's working groups, the Ladies' Circle for the Patronage of Poor Working and Studying Girls in St. Petersburg, which specifically targeted groups of unsheltered girls graduating from educational institutions or coming

⁶⁴⁴ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 152. [что касается выдачи денежных пособий на руки, общество усвоило себе правилом – выдавать такого рода пособия не в виде милостыни, но только в особых уважительных случаях, когда денежная выдача доставит бедной женщине возможность или приняться за какой-нибудь труд [...] или устроиться, не обращаясь уже затем к мелким денежным поборам].

⁶⁴⁵ Doch Evvy, 'Светские отголоски' [Societal Echo], *Modnyi magazin*, 1878, 64. [Как! Опять! Это скучное О.Д.П.Б.Ж. (Общество для покровительства бедным женщинам) и снова этот Дамский кружок! Мы должны признать что это общество крайне назойливое, и под предлогом, что оно имеет девять благотворительных учреждений для *бедных* женщин, опустошает карманы *богатых*. В этот раз, за вычетом всех расходов, оно собрало тысячу рублей – довольно внушительная сумма, вы не находите?].

to the capital to prepare for entry exams. The majority of these girls were from ‘the educated classes’, either orphans or from poor families, predominately from the provinces. Reacting to increasing numbers of such women, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei and her colleagues organized the St. Kseniia’s Shelter where the women could live in decent conditions, learn practical skills, and earn money to pay for their accommodation and food. Rekhnevskaiia-Mei and Voskresenskaia turned *Modnyi magazin* into a printed platform for popularizing this organization, raising funds, and generating a community of like-minded supporters.

St. Ksenia’s Shelter

It is important to emphasize that promotion of the St. Ksenia’s Shelter and related activities in the pages of *Modnyi magazin* was not a sign of Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s and Voskresenskaia’s attempts to popularize their initiative simply because they were engaged in it. Rather, the opposite was true – they used the fashion magazine as a platform to draw the attention of their audience to both the initiative and the social problem behind it.

First of all, by describing the organization, the magazine not only informed its readers about it but, most importantly, brought up the social problems which informed its creation, presenting an example of how women could address them practically. As was argued in *Modnyi magazin*, ‘Among many small details of the ‘woman question’ which most urgently require practical solutions, is *fate of young girls* facing the need to earn their own living’.⁶⁴⁶ This was followed by a description of how St. Kseniia’s Shelter addressed this problem:

The main and most significant support that could be given to young girls facing such conditions consists in protecting them from degrading surroundings, providing them, at the lowest possible price, with decent accommodation and healthy nutrition, and, furthermore, giving them an opportunity to earn money to pay for this.⁶⁴⁷

Modnyi magazin published separate notes dedicated to detailed explanations of the practicalities of the project. For instance, one of them presented the three main goals of the Shelter’s main enterprises, the sewing workshop and affiliated fashion store:

⁶⁴⁶ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 13. [В числе многих мелких подробностей «женского вопроса», которые требуют наискорейшего практического разрешения, состоит участь молодых девушек, поставленных в необходимость зарабатывать себе пропитание личным трудом].

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid. Главная и самая значительная поддержка, которую можно оказать молодым девушкам, поставленным в такие условия, состоит в ограждении их от пагубного влияния среды, доставлении им, за возможно умеренную плату, приличного жилья и здорового питания и, кроме того, предоставление им возможности зарабатывать деньги, чтобы платить за это].

The Circle's fashion store is established with the aim of: 1) delivering work to young girls who studied in schools, shelters, or at home and have dedicated themselves to the craft of sewing, 2) giving an opportunity to other girls who live in the Shelter to acquire this skills — if they wish to and can find time for it — and finally, 3) using all the income from the shop for the maintenance of the lodging, since the fee the girls are paying is hardly enough to sustain the Shelter only.⁶⁴⁸

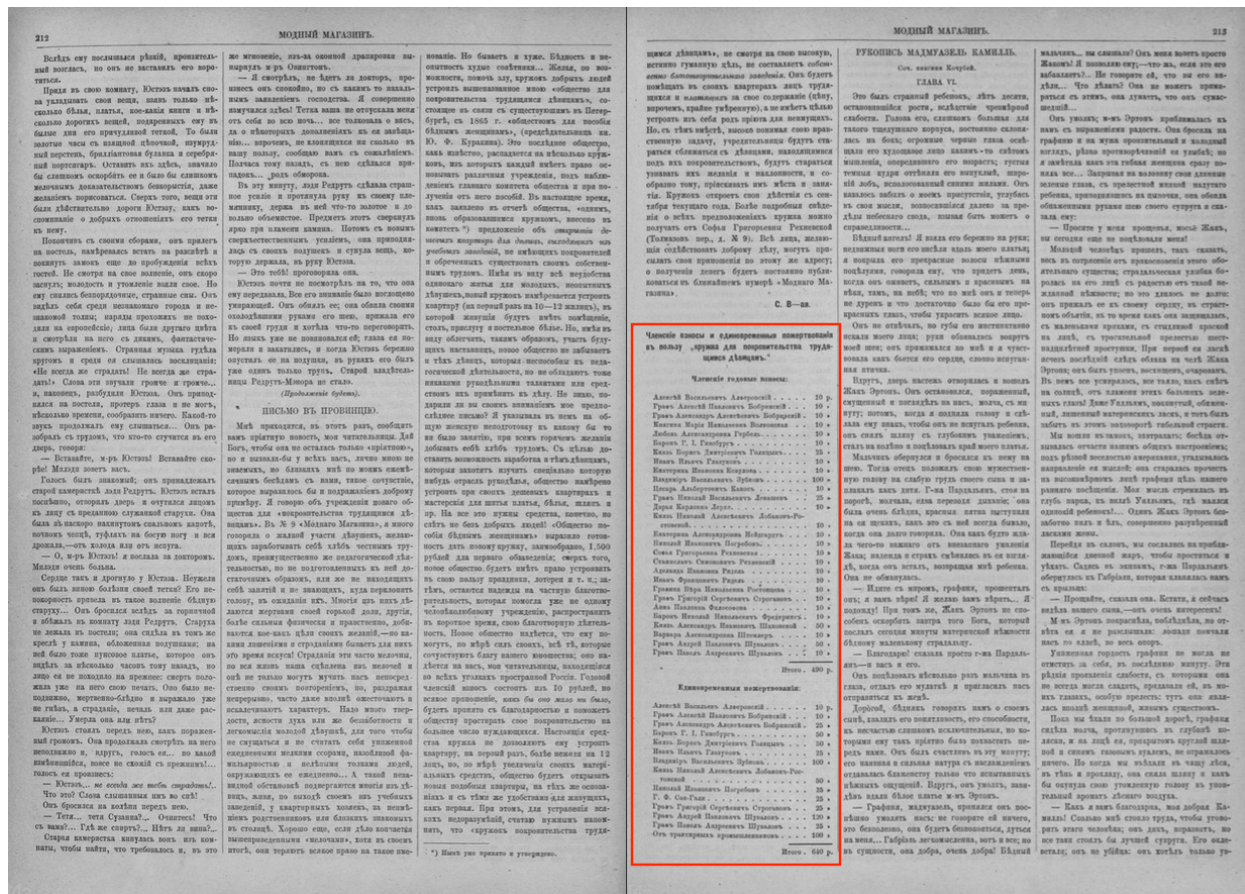
These goals reflect all three dimensions of the pro-women's philanthropy mentioned above: supporting women's higher education, vocational training, and professional life. In this way, by publishing in its pages detailed explanations of the principles and goals of the Shelter, *Modnyi magazin* articulated and popularized among its female readers the long-terms drivers of this and similar initiatives. For example, girls who were living in the Shelter were expected to contribute to its maintenance by paying for their accommodation. First, this was meant to enable the long-lasting economic self-sufficiency of the initiative itself. Second, this was closely related to the long-term vision of its founders who saw the ultimate goal of their activity as enabling women to become capable of earning their living, eventually leaving the Shelter to free up space for others. The purpose behind it was to teach girls practical skills that would guarantee their survival even in case they could not -- or did not want to -- study and work as teachers or doctors, which were the most typical dimensions of women's higher education at the time: 'the [female] founders aim to give the opportunity to earn their living to those girls who for any reason find it impossible or inconvenient to engage in intellectual work'.⁶⁴⁹ For that purpose, the Shelter became the foundation for a micro-infrastructure of women's work in a variety of forms: girls were offered the opportunity to learn and work in the sewing atelier, fashion shop, and kitchen, which were all run by experienced professionals hired by the Circle. This project was presented as a women's school of practical knowledge, which envisaged that within one year girls would acquire the professional skills and practical experience necessary to find a job in the real job market.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ 'В пользу «Кружка для покровительства трудящимся девицам»' [In Favour of the Circle for Patronage of Working Girls], *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 375. [При квартире устроена мастерская дамских платьев, шляп, белья и пр. под руководством закройщицы, бывшей уже в этой должности в одном из первых французских магазинов. Магазин кружка имеет целью: 1) доставлять работу молодым особам, обучавшимся в школах, приютах, или дома и специально посвятившим себя швейному ремеслу; 2) дать возможность приобрести это необходимое для женщины знание и другим, живущим тут девицам — буде они пожелают и найдут для этого время — и, наконец, 3) обратить все доходы с магазина на содержание квартиранток, так как назначаемая с них плата едва окупает одну квартиру].

⁶⁴⁹ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, 13. Его учредительницы имеют целью доставление возможности зарабатывать себе на хлеб тем молодым девицам, которые по какой-либо причине находят невозможным или неудобным заниматься умственным трудом].

⁶⁵⁰ 'Concerning the Patronage of Working Girls', 1874, 280.

Second, *Modnyi magazin* served as a newsletter for its activities, shedding light on the practicalities of running such initiatives and taking different forms. While information about the Shelter and atelier was given in the column dedicated to the women's question, it was also promoted in the fashion editorials written by Rekhnevskaja-Mei and frequently mentioned in social life reviews. For example, a social life reviewer presented St. Kseniia's Shelter among the major charitable organizations which brought 'the biggest, purely moral benefit, by solving the so-called woman question in practical terms'.⁶⁵¹ Right after the Shelter's official opening, the magazine published a long report with detailed descriptions of the funding sources and a list of contributors. Information was also often presented in the form of short practical announcements, e.g. on crowdfunding events organized by the Circle or on the occurrence of vacant places in the Shelter. Furthermore, the magazine became a platform for presenting the results of the Circle's efforts. Since the ultimate goal of the project consisted in helping girls find employment outside of the enterprise, *Modnyi magazin* announced how many of them left the Shelter because they had found jobs in the labor market.



Modnyi magazin, 1874, no. 13. 'A Letter to the Province' by Sofia Voskresenskaia followed by a list of contributors to the Circle for Patronage of Working Girls

⁶⁵¹ 'Feuilleton Sketches', 1876, 142. [принесит наибольшую, чисто нравственную пользу, разрешая на практике так называемый женский вопрос].

Third, the editorial staff invited readers to become members of the society, donators to the Shelter, or consumers of the fashion atelier. In this respect, *Modnyi magazin*, apart from being a sensible platform for popularizing this pro-women's philanthropic initiative, also fulfilled a community-generating function. Not only did it inform readers about the existing metropolitan community of women and pro-women's philanthropists, but it also invited its readers to join the initiative by becoming members of the Society themselves and support poor women or make a financial contribution directly to the shelter. When the project had just been launched, a call for donations was advertised by Voskresenskaia:

The new initiative relies on you, my female readers from all corners of vast Russia. The Circle's annual membership fee is 10 rubbles, but any offering, *no matter how small*, will be received with gratitude and will help the Circle to spread its patronage over a greater number of those who need it.⁶⁵²

Almost every issue of *Modnyi magazin* contained a list of names with the sum of a donation sent to the Shelter (ranging from hundreds to, quite often, just one rubble). Such reports were commonly published after the fashion review, right below Sofia Mei's signature, showing her personal patronage of this issue and granting it additional symbolic weight.



Единоновременныя пожертвованія въ пользу «кружка для покровительства трудящимся дѣвицамъ».	
Отъ М. С. В. (Тамб. губ.) при присылкѣ подписочныхъ денегъ на второе полугодіе . . .	50 к.
Отъ С. Т. Ж. (Нижег. губ.) при присылкѣ подписочныхъ денегъ на второе полугодіе . . .	50 к.
Отъ «двухъ учительницъ»	1 р.
Отъ С. Н.	25 к.

Modnyi magazin, 1874, no. 14. A list of donations to the Circle (in the preceding issue the editorial staff encouraged its readers to donate 'no matter how little').

Fourth, one of the objectives of *Modnyi magazin* was to popularize metropolitan trends across the empire, which is reflected in the name of the column 'Letter to Province'. Therefore, the detailed descriptions of successful initiatives, including St. Kseniia's Shelter, and a focus on the practical details of launching such organizations aimed to provide an example to be followed:

⁶⁵² Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 212. [Новое общество надеется на вас, мои читательницы, находящиеся во всех уголках пространной России. Годовой членский взнос составляет 10 рублей, но всякое приношение, как бы оно мало ни было, будет принято с благодарностью и поможет обществу простирать свое покровительство на большее число нуждающихся].

‘Why would not our philanthropy ladies in the province borrow a good idea?’⁶⁵³ Thus, while reporting on the official establishment of the Ladies’ Circle and the St. Ksenia Shelter, Voskresenskaia wrote in one of her ‘Letters’:

This time, I have the occasion to share with you some pleasant news, my readers. With God’s help, it will not remain merely ‘pleasant’ but will provoke in all of you – who I do not know in person but close to me from my monthly conversations with you – such a feeling of compassion that would express itself in following this good example.⁶⁵⁴

This was followed by a detailed description of the initiative presented as an example of how women could positively contribute to the emancipatory process. By discussing practical details of launching such projects, *Modnyi magazin* was facilitating the spread of a practice undertaken by St. Petersburg women out to the province. First, by providing detailed descriptions of such initiatives, the magazine offered its readers ready-to-copy examples of how women could contribute to the emancipatory process in a practical, efficient, and legitimate way. Second, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei’s initiative was presented in the magazine not as a unique case but as part of an emerging network of like-minded Russian women, working both in Petersburg and Moscow and in the provinces. According to Stites, one of the most important aspects of feminist philanthropy was the way ‘it brought together many women of similar backgrounds in new situations that transcended the salons and the other established forms of social intercourse that prevailed among ladies’.⁶⁵⁵ It was the pre-condition which allowed Russian feminists to transform the traditional ladies occupation into an early form of civic activism. While Rekhnevskaiia-Mei was one of the most active among these women, her magazine, thanks to the invaluable contribution of Voskresenskaia, became the printed platform for encouraging other women across the Empire to participate in this imagined community through the same practice.

International context

Furthermore, Russian women’s initiatives were presented as intrinsically related to the broader transnational women’s movement. For example, after discussing the news of the Society for Support of Poor Women, Voskresenskaia switched to describing another initiative: ‘in London,

⁶⁵³ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 43. [почему бы нашим дамам-благотворительницам в провинции не позаимствоваться благою мыслью?].

⁶⁵⁴ Voskresenskaia, ‘Letter to the Province’, *Modnyi magazin*, 1874, 212. Мне приходится, в этот раз, сообщить вам приятную новость, мои читательницы. Дай Бог, чтобы она не осталась только «приятною», но и вызвала бы у всех вас, лично мною не знаемых, но близких мне по моим ежемесячным беседам с вами, такое сочувствие, которое выразилось бы и подражанием доброму примеру].

⁶⁵⁵ Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement*, 68.

some women from the middle class launch societies which aim at organizing needlework, fashion and similar workshops, where the female founders themselves and their families work'.⁶⁵⁶ In this way, the columnist presented the Russian project as one among a variety of women's initiatives created for providing women with work. To give another example, with regards to the Society for Support of Poor women, it was reported that its women founders published a brochure in French, *Notices sur la Société d'Assistance aux femmes pauvres a St.-Pétérbourg*. It was prepared for informing the International Sanitary Congress gathering in Brussels on the activities of the Russian society and pointing to 'the practical direction of the charitable intentions of those persons who manage the Society'⁶⁵⁷ in general and St. Kseniia's Shelter in particular. Despite the geographical remoteness of Russia and political limitations imposed on its activists, *Modnyi magazin* stressed that socially engaged Russian women were nonetheless connected to their counterparts abroad through the sharing of goals, principles, and approaches. One of the columnists wrote: 'of course, we are still far behind the enlightened European states when it comes to public philanthropy, but Russian women cannot be denied the readiness to be useful and help those less fortunate. A lot has already been initiated, thanks to the initiatives of energetic female activists, but how much still remains untouched and flagrant!'.⁶⁵⁸ Discussing the Russian presence in the Women's Pavilion of the 1876 World's Fair in Philadelphia, a contributor to the magazine proudly highlighted how the results of the work of Russian women's organizations 'impressed the Americans and their European guests, not excluding the Russians themselves. Nobody considered or investigated, and even we, Russians, did not know what a Russian woman is capable of'.⁶⁵⁹ Overall, Russians were presented as partaking in international women's trends which were gaining momentum across Europe and the United States. For example, Voskresenskaia quoted a discussion published in *Queen*:

'Women are often accused of lacking the ability to work together; they say that women do not know how to subordinate their personal aspirations and whims to the general requirements of the matter, and, therefore, all their good endeavors end unsuccessfully'.

Queen refutes such accusations by referring to facts demonstrating that ladies who take

⁶⁵⁶ Voskresenskaia, 'Letters to the Province', *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, 308. [в Лондоне, некоторые дамы принадлежащие к среднему сословию, основывают общества, имеющие целью устройство белошвейных, модных и т.п. мастерских, в которых намереваются работать сами учредительницы и их семьи].

⁶⁵⁷ Untitled and unsigned note, *Modnyi magazin*, 1876, 192. [практическое направление благотворительных стремлений лиц, заправляющих делами общества].

⁶⁵⁸ 'Miscellany. Shelter for Female Teachers', 1874, 74. [Конечно, мы еще далеко отстали от просвещенных европейских государств в делах общественной благотворительности, но нельзя отказать русским женщинам в готовности приносить пользу и в желании помогать обиженной братии. Много уже начато, благодаря инициативе энергетических деятельниц, но сколько еще остается нетронутым и вопиющим!].

⁶⁵⁹ 'Мозаика. Роль русской женщины в войне («Голос»)' [Mosaic. The Role of a Russian Woman in War (*Golos*)], 1877, 12. [поразили американцев и их европейских гостей, не исключая и русских. Никто не считал, не исследовал и даже мы, русские, не знали прежде, на что способна русская женщина].

care of the schools for poor in London do not waste their energy but make sure that their initiatives provide positive results. Here, in Russia, we can also confirm this by referring to the tireless activities of some charitable societies led by women. Mentioning even a few of them would already be enough to prove the groundlessness of such accusations against women's philanthropic activity'.⁶⁶⁰

At the same time, it should be stressed that, although the editorial staff commonly referred to Western experience and practices, feminist philanthropy had particular social significance in Russia. Pushkareva explains how Russian women's charitable activities in the second half of the nineteenth century were characteristic of feminism under oppression and with limited opportunities for political action.⁶⁶¹ In the socio-political context of the Russian autocracy, any form of civic activity was an utterly risky affair. As was argued in the introduction to this dissertation, Russian women's resistance to their social marginalization, apart from the illegal and uncensored revolutionary activity of the radicals, took mostly 'subtle' forms. Feminist philanthropic initiatives as a form of civic engagement was one of a number of major expressions of such 'gentle resistance'.⁶⁶² In this context, *Modnyi magazin*'s reasoning contributed to the transformation of this traditional Russian women's activity from within and attributed to it the meaning of an organized and goal-oriented civic practice. Furthermore, as Stites points out, for feminists, establishing and managing philanthropic organization 'provided experience in leadership, nurtured a feeling of self-respect, and aroused a consciousness of women's ability to function in public life'.⁶⁶³ Accordingly, by inviting Russian women to support and initiate philanthropic organizations, *Modnyi magazin* suggested a practical way for them to contribute to woman's emancipation, not only by supporting their less fortunate female compatriots, but also by engaging in meaningful social activity as such. In all these ways, the magazine functioned as a mediating platform between its female readers and the emerging women's movement.

⁶⁶⁰ Voskresenskaia, 'Letter to the Province', 1874, 246. [Женщин часто обвиняют в неспособности к совместному действию, говорят, что они не умеют подчинять свои личные стремления и прихоти общим требованиям дела и, потому, всякие их благие начинания кончаются неудачно». Опровергая такие обвинения, «Queen» приводит в свое доказательство факты, из которых видно, что дамы, принявшие на себя попечительство о школах для бедных в Лондоне, не теряют энергии и стараются поставить эти школы на хорошую ногу; мы здесь, в России, можем указать тоже на неутомимую деятельность некоторых благотворительных обществ, состоящих под ведомством женщин. Упоминание даже нескольких из них достаточно для того, чтобы доказать неосновательность таких упреков против женской благотворительной деятельности].

⁶⁶¹ Pushkareva, 'Feminism in Russia: Two Centuries of History', 365-383.

⁶⁶² Clements, *History of Women in Russia*, 6.

⁶⁶³ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 68.

Concluding remarks

Modnyi magazin was one of the first Russian women's magazines to include the emerging 'woman question' as a constitutive part of its agenda and the only one to systematically and coherently discuss it for twenty years within the changing socio-economic and political climate. Its rhetorical angle evolved over time from engaging in controversial discussions about women's status in the liberal 1860s to gravitating towards a practical approach to tackling down-to-earth issues in the post-reform 1870s, a decade marked by both intensified censorship and an ever-more pressing urgency of women's socio-economic integration. Although the word was never referenced in the magazine, the term 'feminism' was exactly what Stites and other scholars of the Russian women's movement understand by *Modnyi magazin*'s midway standpoint between the conservatives, on the one hand, and the radicals and nihilists, on the other. The journal questioned traditional gender limitations, advocated for women's education and paid employment, and promoted women's civic activity from a moderate reformist, or early feminist, standpoint. Remaining within the seemingly conventional framework of the fashion magazine, *Modnyi magazin*'s editorial staff nevertheless insistently questioned the appropriateness of the status quo concerning a woman's position in society and pushed the boundaries of socially acceptable female roles. It offered to its audience a midway image of contemporary femininity, presenting Russian women with a rare alternative to two extremes: the archaically-conservative and the radically-progressive models. The moderate reformist approach to women's emancipation was presented in the journal as 'natural', 'logical', 'necessary', 'unavoidable' – in other words, as a 'reasonable' and 'practical' reaction to the challenges of the time: one that was intellectual, economic, social, and local, as well as international. By doing this, the magazine's editorial staff emphasized how its ideas called not for the subversion of the general order of things, but for change that time itself demanded from Russian society, opposition to which would cause more harm than good. By presenting women's emancipation as rational and reasonable common sense, the rhetoric of *Modnyi magazin* 'naturalized' the discourse on women's emancipation, opposed it to any specific ideology or doctrine and thus remained within mainstream rhetorical lines. This 'reasonable' and practice-oriented approach, so characteristic of the early feminists, as well as the extensive promotion of pro-women's charitable initiatives, allow for the qualification of *Modnyi magazin*'s editorial standpoint as distinctively feminist. These findings lead me to two major conclusions.

Firstly, *Modnyi magazin* can be seen as the first women-targeted platform that systematically promoted a quintessentially feminist response to the Russian "woman question". Unlike the openly feminist Russian publications of the second half of the nineteenth century, which never lasted long or became popular (e.g. *Drug zhenshchin* ('Women's Friend'), 1882-1884),

Modnyi magazin popularized emancipatory ideas among its relatively broad and varied female audience as early as 1862 – and then systematically over the twenty years of its existence. Furthermore, the woman-edited *Modnyi magazin* was the first Russian feminist publication in the full sense of the term. Regarding the nineteenth-century press' rhetoric on women's emancipation, Russian scholar Irina Iukina differentiates among the official, liberal, revolutionary-democratic, and the early feminist discourses, reasonably linking the emergence of the latter with women's magazines, 'the qualitative characteristic of which was the articulation of women's problems in the interpretation of women themselves'.⁶⁶⁴ At the same time, she observes how, before the 1890s, all popular women's (created by and for women) magazines 'reflected and contributed to the official public discourse and concept of femininity, the central component of which was successful marriage as the main token of a woman's social success'.⁶⁶⁵ However, while the fashion press is traditionally not associated with feminism and the woman question, a closer look at *Modnyi magazin* provides a strong counterargument to this assumption. Rekhnevskaja-Mei's journal was a printed organ which articulated the standpoint of Russian feminists; it reported on their activities, formulated and promoted their standpoint among the wider audience, generated a community of supporters, and converted new members.

Secondly, while Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei belonged to the circle of the first Russian feminists, the commercial viability of her fashion magazine provided her with a platform for spreading these feminists' ideas among a comparatively broad female audience over a significant period of time. Under her editorship, the 'conventional' women's magazine became the printed medium of Russian feminism during its earliest stage, when its discourse and standpoint were just being shaped within the very narrow social circle of pro-women's activists. *Modnyi magazin's* regular coverage of their activities provided feminists with the visibility and publicity that they lacked and needed, discussed women's emancipation in the period of strict censorship, and, most importantly, formulated and promoted their vision in the decades when the audience for a purely feminist publication was not yet formed. Most importantly, *Modnyi magazin* targeted precisely the group of women which could potentially join the feminist movement or at least support it, actively or passively. The target audience, or at least the average 'target reader' of the magazine, was claimed to belong to the educated and socially-conscious upper class. At the same time, the magazine's popular and 'light-hearted' subject – fashion – implied that its audience consisted primarily of women of traditional upbringing and conventional lifestyle. In addition, the magazine's self-positioning as 'a good society's journal', with 'decency' being its proclaimed core

⁶⁶⁴ Irina Iukina, 'Discourse of the Nineteenth-Century Women's Press' [Дискурс женской прессы XIX века], *Женские и гендерные исследования* [Women and Gender Studies], no. 5 (2000): 32.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid, 33.

value, determined the framework for its rhetoric. As a result, its social agenda was teetered between emancipation and traditions. While the social profile of the magazine's target audience might seem contradictory to that of the feminists, there were, however, more correlations than principal differences. Stites describes early Russian feminists as 'well educated members of the privileged classes, past their first youth when they began their work'⁶⁶⁶ and points to 'their preference for caution and their refusal to break completely with the past, their traditions, and their families, as the nihilists were to do'.⁶⁶⁷ Therefore, the difference between the fashion magazine's female readers, on the one hand, and moderate proponents of women's emancipation, on the other, was primarily a matter of degree with regards to their social awareness and active engagement. Since reducing this particular discrepancy was arguably the very objective of the editorial agenda, *Modnyi magazin* became a legitimate and viable public platform for popularizing the 'mainstream' feminist standpoint.

However limited in scope its readership was at the time if compared to publications that targeted a general audience (e.g. the most popular magazine in the imperial period, illustrated *Niva* had 100 000 readers), the fashion press was nonetheless the most popular women's periodical genre of the second half of the century. On the one hand, in the years when the question of women's emancipation was just gaining momentum, early feminist ideas were presented and explained to its primary audience – educated women from the privileged classes. On the other hand, as *Modnyi magazin* was among the first fashion magazines targeting a female audience beyond wealthy nobility, it thus also fulfilled the socialization function for women from the middling strata. Emphasis on the moderate, 'reasonable' approach and the prioritization of 'respectable' behavior facilitated the legitimization of the feminist standpoint in the eyes of women from broader social circles and potentially contributed to 'converting' them into at least passive supporters of these initially elite ideas. In all these ways, the magazine directly contributed to the shaping and spreading of feminist discourse in Russia.

To sum up, I return to the central question of this chapter and dissertation: How did Rekhnevskaja-Mei and her editorial staff negotiate the double peripherality of their readers? Similar to the magazine's fashion discourse, this took two major forms: providing new symbols for appreciation (particularly the socio-cultural values and gender ideals of feminists) and offering a practical way to contribute to women's emancipation (through initiating and supporting organized women's charity). The magazine's rhetoric was focused on the local context and its particular challenges, but also regarded this context as part of a broader international one which

⁶⁶⁶ Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 66.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

served as a point of reference and source of inspiration, providing a sense of affiliation with the wider community.

Conclusions: Femininity at the Crossroads

In the average image of a reader as shaped by fashion magazines, contends Roland Barthes, ‘we obviously recognize the permanent compromise which marks the relations between mass culture and its consumers: the Woman of Fashion is simultaneously what the reader is and what she dreams of being’.⁶⁶⁸ For the readers of the St. Petersburg fashion periodical *Modnyi magazin*, the Barthesian dichotomy of aspiration versus reality was valid in a variety of dimensions, such as aristocracy vs. the middle classes, luxury vs. limited means, modernity vs. traditions, public vs. private, outer vs. inner beauty. Nonetheless, for Russian women, all the above-mentioned dream-reality dichotomies were positioned within a larger one: Russians’ anxious sense of provinciality vis-à-vis Europeans, in accordance with which socialization in the Western cultural code was socially prestigious, a sign of refinement and belonging to the upper classes.⁶⁶⁹ Furthermore, Russian women occupied a peripheral status not only on the international stage, as Russians; as women, they were also marginal within their own society, and this factor united them with their European counterparts. This dissertation was thus dedicated to studying how the editorial staff of *Modnyi magazin*, led by its editor Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei, addressed the double peripherality of its female audience – as Russians and as women – in shaping the contemporary image of femininity.

For this, I first studied the role of the editor in shaping the idiosyncratic format and agenda of the magazine, which merged in pages the discussions on fashion and women’s social status. Then, I examined the image of femininity which Rekhnevskaja-Mei shaped in her regular fashion column. Finally, I studied *Modnyi magazin*’s rhetoric in regards to the woman question by analysing the journalistic materials published in the literary section.

My analysis lead me to the conclusion that *Modnyi magazin* was a platform where femininities were discussed in a particular and unique way. Thus, its rhetoric was located at the intersection of Russian and Western cultural fields, on the one hand, and the discourses on fashion and feminism, on the other. First, *Modnyi magazin* could be seen as a missing link between the elitist and popular fashion press in Russia, on the one hand, and between the entertainment fashion press and emerging women-targeted periodicals discussing women’s social status, on the other. Second, Rekhnevskaja-Mei’s idiosyncratic fashion column not only addressed Russian women’s geographical and socio-cultural remoteness from the Parisian metropolis. It also discussed

⁶⁶⁸ Roland Barthes, *Fashion System*, trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (London: University of California Press, 1990), 260-1.

⁶⁶⁹ See Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: advice literature, polite culture, and gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

traditional women's work from the emancipatory point of view. Third, the editorial staff addressed the question of women's social marginality both in Russia and in the West. Under Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's editorship, the magazine became a cultural melting pot that merged different socio-cultural discourses, allowing for the generation of original gendered rhetoric.

The dual socio-cultural peripherality of Russian women – thus, vis-à-vis their Western counterparts as well as men – constituted the nerve of the magazine's rhetoric. The cultural peripherality of Russians was explicitly mentioned by the magazine, not only in regards to the Parisian fashion authority but, most importantly, in frequent references to the 'enlightened', 'civilized', and 'educated' Western countries. The social peripherality of Russian women vis-à-vis men formed the central point of the magazine's overall feminist standpoint, which was explicitly discussed in the literary section but also touched upon in Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's fashion column. My study of the magazine's discourse on femininity demonstrated that considerations of Russian women's cultural and social peripherality were closely intertwined within it.

This became evident in the ways in which the magazine's editorial staff tried to negotiate the status quo. It should be remembered how both Shils and Hannerz argued that the major way in which local intellectuals can address the peripherality of their society (or social group) is by creatively assimilating socio-cultural forms of the center in such ways that are beneficial to solving the periphery's problems and uncovering its own creative potential.⁶⁷⁰ Clearly reflecting this pattern, *Modnyi magazin*'s assimilation of 'metropolitan' cultural inventory (discourses, practices, ideas) reveals an attempt to benefit its local female readers – not only as Russians but also as women.

First, Western gendered discourses were not only introduced to Russians but also recontextualized and transformed into an idiosyncratic local rhetoric. By juxtaposing Russian and foreign developments, *Modnyi magazin* shaped its discourse on fashion and women's emancipation in line with Western discourse, while simultaneously guarding its local socio-cultural specificity. For example, in regards to fashion, this found its expression in the very 'hybrid' format of the magazine, which Rekhnevskaiia-Mei tailored specifically to reflect the variety and specificity of the needs of her local audience. Equally original was her fashion discourse, which both encouraged Russians to cherish their 'native element' and creatively re-interpreted the notions of *parisien*, *élégance*, and fashionable femininity with regards to local context. In a similar way, Western developments and debates in the domain of women's emancipation were discussed, first and foremost, in regards to those which currently took place in Russia. Interestingly enough, the magazine's editorial staff did not attached its rhetoric to

⁶⁷⁰ Shils, 'Metropolis and Province', 369; Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 258.

following one particular national context, source of information or line of argumentation but refracted the incoming information flow selectively and critically. For example, while France was admitted as the ultimate global fashion leader, it was nonetheless denied such authority when it came to women's emancipation, where England and the United States were claimed the world's frontrunners. Another example could be that Rekhnevskaja-Mei adopted the modern European practice of home dressmaking but not the discourse of domesticity, which was associated with it. As a result, the magazine's rhetoric resulted in what Hannerz called 'innovative acts of cultural brokerage'.⁶⁷¹

Such a selective approach to foreign discourses brings me to the second key aspect of the magazine's approach to negotiating double peripherality of its readers. The ideas and socio-cultural patterns suggested by the magazine were not only original but, most importantly, reflected attempts to challenge Russian women's marginalized position within their own society. Thus, by engaging with Western ideas, the editorial staff presented Russian women with opportunities to broaden the spectrum of traditional roles, representations, and ways of expressing themselves. Both the contemporary images of femininity and the modern women's practices which it promoted aimed at widening the imagery of femininity: e.g. an image of an elegant woman who does not need to anxiously follow fashion but knows how to make her dresses on a budget. Women's organized social engagement (as opposed to the Orthodox almsgiving) is another example of popularizing such ideals and practices which suggested novel perspectives on Russian women's social roles. Thus, the West was most commonly referred to as a source of ideas for broadening Russian women's limited opportunities and a point of reference in legitimizing the need to change the status quo. In other words, speaking in Hannerz' terms, Western socio-cultural forms (e.g. gender norms) were accepted by the editorial staff 'not because they [we]re of the center, but because, recontextualized to [Russian] conditions, they [we]re good to think with and express with', particularly concerning the broadening of Russian women's behavioral patterns.⁶⁷² As a result of these observations, I came to a conclusion that peripherality as Russians was in fact subordinated to discussing women's overall social marginality, in Russia as well as abroad.

Another factor which formatively impacted the magazine's rhetoric on femininity was the fact that *Modnyi magazin* signified the transition of the Russian fashion press from a focus on the narrow elite towards a more inclusive rhetoric. *Modnyi magazin* preserved the social elite as the formative part of its target audience and thus could not yet be called a purely middle-class or popular magazine, as was the case with its competitors launched later in the 1860s. However, it

⁶⁷¹ Ibid, 242.

⁶⁷² Ibid, 258.

was exactly this intermediate position which determined the significance and originality of its rhetoric on femininity. The editorial challenge thus consisted in finding common ground among the interests, needs, and (limited) opportunities of both wealthy noblewomen and their female compatriots of more humble origins and/or modest means. As a result, *Modnyi magazin* understated the importance of social, economic, and geographical boundaries, put an emphasis on shared standards, problems, and targets, and called for women's overall sense of solidarity. Targeting women beyond a particular social class, the editorial staff developed the rhetoric which fostered the formation of Russian women's self-perception as a social group.

At the same time, marginal status within their own society also united Russian women with their Western counterparts. In this respect, too, the magazine prioritized common ground over cultural differences and geographical remoteness. Since its primary purpose consisted in helping Russian women keep up with trends, standards, and tastes originating from the global Parisian metropolis, *Modnyi magazin's* fashion rhetoric created the basis for a cosmopolitan standpoint. It thus fostered a sense of affiliation with the transnational fashionable community. *Rekhnevskiaia-Mei* enabled more Russian women to relate to this community by suggesting that they appropriate the 'Parisian' approach to clothing and adopt the practice of economical dressmaking.

Furthermore, the magazine's rhetoric on the woman question extended this cosmopolitan narrative beyond the domain of fashion. The editorial staff not only presented Russian debates on women's emancipation as part of the transnational trend that was gaining momentum across the 'educated world'. It also put a particular emphasis on organized philanthropy as a way for Russian women to practically engage with the emerging international women's movement. By targeting Russian women as a social group, presenting their interests as similar to those of their European counterparts, and addressing local issues through references to transnational developments, *Modnyi magazin* provided its readers with a sense of affiliation to the cosmopolitan imagined community of women. Once again, the magazine's editorial staff presented this community as centred around those standards and practices meant to benefit Russian women and broaden their opportunities for self-expression and self-realization.

Finally, although fashion and feminism could be seen as generally unrelated – and even contradictory – domains, the magazine's rhetoric connected them within the same editorial discourse. Despite the inherently contradictory character of fashion press discourse, *Modnyi magazin's* rhetoric and standpoint are strikingly coherent, especially when regarded in light of their cross-cultural nature and the magazine's hybrid target audience. The magazine's articles on both topics simultaneously addressed Russian women's cultural and social peripherality. For instance, ideas on women's work expressed in the fashion column were directly related to those

discussed in materials on women's emancipation. In this respect, it was particularly Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei's individual voice, expressed in her fashion column as well as in the articles published in the literary section, that brought together the magazine's dual format.

The vantage point which reconciled discourses on fashion and feminism and determined the overall coherence of the editorial framework was the magazine's adherence to two principles, or 'values': moderation and practicality. Moderation was related to the magazine's clear prioritization of the midway standpoint and rejection of any extreme ideas, e.g. those defended by both the radicals and the conservatives or suggestions to either slavishly imitate the West or completely reject its influence. In contrast, *Modnyi magazin* promoted reasonability and moderation, which it also presented as common sense, and sought to occupy the position between the margins. It thus was poised between Russian and foreign, public and domestic, serious debates and lighthearted fashion. A constitutive component of this editorial standpoint was its adherence to practicality. A focus on the possible and achievable determined *Modnyi magazin*'s overall rhetoric as well as practice-oriented solutions suggested to its readers in regards to both fashion and feminism: dressmaking and philanthropy. The ideas and practices promoted by the magazine's editorial staff subtly pushed the boundaries of traditional women's roles yet remained socially-acceptable as well as accessible for the majority.

These editorial priorities formatively impacted the magazine's rhetoric on its central subject – femininity. Instead of merely following the lines of any particular standpoint – local or foreign, upmarket or middle class, fashion- or feminism-related, conservative or revolutionary, *Modnyi magazin*'s rhetoric merged the components of these discourses, offered its readers an idiosyncratic model of modern, fashionable and emancipated femininity, and suggested ways to achieve this. While the target reader of *Modnyi magazin* was relatively vague in regards to her socio-cultural standing, the editorial discourse on femininity, rather than reflecting any pre-existing ideals, creatively constructed them. This was particularly important in light of contemporary developments taking place in the Russian Empire. *Modnyi magazin*'s discourse on femininity absorbed and reflected the complexity of the historical, cultural, and socio-economic context in which Russian women found themselves in the years following liberal reforms.

All this points to the contribution of Sofia Rekhnevskaja-Mei in shaping contemporary gender norms. As a doubly peripheral intellectual, she was aware of the socio-cultural position of *Modnyi magazin*'s female readers: peripheral, or marginal, in two different and generally unrelated ways. Nevertheless, thanks to the editor's approach and agenda, the two lines intersected in its pages and were merged and reconciled in a mutually-reinforcing manner. Not only did she bridge the cultural and geographical gap between Russia and the West, but she subordinated this to the

negotiation of Russian women's disadvantaged social status within their own society. In particular, she instrumentalized Western cultural patterns to the benefit of her readers, assimilating metropolitan cultural forms in regards to the local circumstances, adopting selected metropolitan cultural patterns to address local problems, and fostering Russian women's sense of inclusion into the international context. She addressed their double peripherality and suggested practical ways of managing it.

It was the complexity of the editor's own background that allowed her to perceive the varied discourses and influences, bring them into the magazine's pages, and, most importantly, transform and merge them within the coherent model of femininity. Within Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's idiosyncratic editorial framework, fashion discourse merged in the pages of *Modnyi magazin* with the question of women's emancipation, while simultaneously granting its female readers a sense of affiliation with other women, both in Russia and in the West. Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's rhetoric in general reveals an attempt to creatively construct femininity within a domain that advocated for the mere following of foreign socio-cultural forms and reproduction of traditional gender limitations. In contrast, she negotiated the cultural and gender-related peripherality of her Russian audience by focusing on the local context and utilizing metropolitan influences to reinterpret – or, rather, create a novel image of – modern Russian femininity. This is where Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's personal standpoint became decisive: the editor's rhetoric was to a significant extent determined by her own ideas, standards, and values. As a result, 'remaining within the narrow boundaries of her specialization',⁶⁷³ she made her idiosyncratic midway ideas reach women across both a relatively broad social spectrum and the vast space of the Russian Empire.

This brings me back to Barbara Engel's argument that Russian women's engagement in transforming tradition often took subtle forms of 'gentle resistance'.⁶⁷⁴ Rekhnevskaiia-Mei's editorship of *Modnyi magazin* was certainly a remarkable case of such transformative engagement with Russian socio-cultural norms, taking place not only on an individual level but also encouraging other women to follow her lead. Furthermore, this case sheds light on multiple subtle links which connected Russian women to their European (and even American) counterparts. In this respect, this study also addressed the gap identified by Linda Edmondson, who argued that we lack understanding on the role of Western influence in shaping Russian women's experience and representations. By editing *Modnyi magazin*, Rekhnevskaiia-Mei thus formatively contributed to shaping Russian women's history as part of the pan-European one.

⁶⁷³ Sofia Rekhnevskaiia-Mei, 'Fashions', *Modnyi magazin*, 1866, 362.

⁶⁷⁴ Barbara Clements, 'Accommodation', in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. by Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel and Christine Worobec (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 7.

This dissertation was dedicated to studying a single case of mainstream Russian fashion and women's press in the pre-revolutionary period. This decision was determined by the prominence of this case: the idiosyncrasy and complexity of the journal, its unique intermediary position in the history of this genre(s), and its remarkable – yet forgotten – woman editor. By focusing on Rekhnevskaja-Mei's *Modnyi magazin*, I aimed to outline a wide range of topics and open the floor for further research in this vast and neglected domain. I was fortunate to be able to reconstruct the editor's biography, due primarily to the fact that she was married to a well-known Russian poet. However, neither her relatively famous name nor her long professional career has helped – until now – in including her legacy in the annals of Russian – and European – women's journalistic history. In the majority of cases, the only information which could be found on a woman editor of the fashion press was her name, making their contributions even less noticed. Nevertheless, in this dissertation I shed light on research angles which could be further explored even with the lack of biographical information.

The second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century was a vibrant time for the development of the fashion and women's press market in Russia, for the broadening of its agenda and for links to the European press market. The majority of topics raised by Rekhnevskaja-Mei and her editorial staff in *Modnyi magazin* was innovative at the time. However, fierce competition among the publishers in the 1870s allows us to suggest that her competitors, too, might want to incorporate in their editorial agendas the topics first introduced by this journal. In this way, this research invites further exploration of this field. Finally, my study of *Modnyi magazin* itself was certainly not exhaustive. To give just one example, the literary analysis of the original and translated literary pieces published in *Modnyi magazin*, as well as the ways in which the editorial staff managed to acquire the publication rights on them, could constitute the subject of a separate project. Another potentially insightful topic might be a comparative analysis of *Modnyi magazin* and its main competitor *Modnyi svet*, as well as the magazine which resulted from their merger in 1884, *Modnyi svet i modnyi magazin* (1884-1917).

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